GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

GRAUSTARK

THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK

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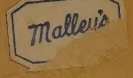

A BOOK OF
GRAUSTARK ROMANCES

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containing two complete novels
by
GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

GRAUSTARK
THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

By arrangement with Dodd, Mead & Company

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GRAUSTARK

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I

MR. GRENFALL LORRY SEEKS ADVENTURE

Mr. Grenfall Lorry boarded the east-bound express at Denver with all the air of a martyr. He had traveled pretty much all over the world, and he was not without resources, but the prospect of a twenty-five hundred mile journey alone filled him with dismay. The country he knew; the scenery had long since lost its attractions for him; countless newsboys had failed to tempt him with the literature they thrust in his face, and as for his fellow-passengers—well, he preferred to be alone. And so it was that he gloomily motioned the porter to his boxes and mounted the steps with weariness.

As it happened, Mr. Grenfall Lorry did not have a dull moment after the train started. He stumbled on a figure that leaned toward the window in the dark passageway. With reluctant civility he apologized; a lady stood up to let him pass, and for an

instant in the half light their eyes met, and that is why the miles rushed by with incredible speed.

Mr. Lorry had been dawdling away the months in Mexico and California. For years he had felt, together with many other people, that a sea-voyage was the essential beginning of every journey; he had started round the world soon after leaving Cambridge; he had fished through Norway and hunted in India, and shot everything from grouse on the Scottish moors to the rapids above Assouan. He had run in and out of countless towns and countries on the coast of South America; he had done Russia and the Rhone valley and Brittany and Damascus; he had seen them all—but not until then did it occur to him that there might be something of interest nearer home. True he had thought of joining some Englishmen on a hunting tour in the Rockies, but that had fallen through. When the idea of Mexico did occur to him he gave orders to pack his things, purchased interminable green tickets, dined unusually well at his club, and was off in no time to the unknown West.

There was a theory in his family that it would have been a decenter thing for him to stop running about and settle down to work. But his thoughtful father had given him a wealthy mother, and as earning a living was not a necessity, he failed to see why it was a duty. "Work is becoming to some men," he once declared, "like whiskers or red ties, but it

does not follow that all men can stand it." After that the family found him "hopeless," and the argument dropped.

He was just under thirty years, as good-looking as most men, with no one dependent upon him and an income that had withstood both the Maison Dorée and a dahabeah on the Nile. He never tired of seeing things and peoples and places. "There's game to be found anywhere," he said, "only it's sometimes out of season. If I had my way—and millions—I should run a newspaper. Then all the excitements would come to me. As it is—I'm poor, and so I have to go all over the world after them."

This agreeable theory of life had worked well; he was a little bored at times—not because he had seen too much, but because there were not more things left to see. He had managed somehow to keep his enthusiasms through everything—and they made life worth living. He felt, too, a certain elation—like a spirited horse—at turning toward home, but Washington had not much to offer him, and the thrill did not last. His big bag and his hat-box—pasted over with foolish labels from continental hotels—were piled in the corner of his compartment, and he settled back in his seat with a pleasurable sense of expectancy. The presence in the next room of a very smart appearing young woman was prominent in his consciousness. It gave him an uneasiness which was the beginning of delight. He

had seen her for only a second in the passage-way, but that second had made him hold himself a little straighter. "Why is it," he wondered, "that some girls make you stand like a footman the moment you see them?" Grenfall had been in love too many times to think of marriage; his habit of mind was still general, and he classified women broadly. At the same time he had a feeling that in this case generalities did not apply well; there was something about the girl that made him hesitate at labelling her "Class A, or B, or Z." What it was he did not know, but—unaccountably—she filled him with an affected formality. He felt like bowing to her with a grand air and much dignity. And yet he realized that his successes had come from confidence.

At luncheon he saw her in the dining-car. Her companions were elderly persons—presumably her parents. They talked mostly in French—occasionally using a German word or phrase. The old gentleman was stately and austere—with an air of deference to the young woman which Grenfall did not understand. His appearance was very striking; his face pale and heavily lined; moustache and imperial gray; the eyebrows large and bushy, and the jaw and chin square and firm. The white-haired lady carried her head high with unmistakable gentility. They were all dressed in traveling suits which suggested something foreign, but not Vienna nor Paris; smart, but far from American tastes.

Lorry watched the trio with great interest. Twice during luncheon the young woman glanced toward him carelessly and left an annoying impression that she had not seen him. As they left the table and passed into the observation car, he stared at her with some defiance. But she was smiling, and her dimples showed, and Grenfall was ashamed. For some moments he sat gazing from the car window—forgetting his luncheon—dreaming.

When he got back to his compartment he rang vigorously for the porter. A coin was carelessly displayed in his fingers. "Do you suppose you could find out who has the next compartment, porter?"

"I don't know their name, suh, but they's goin' to New York jis as fas' as they can git thuh. I ain' ax um no questions, 'cause thuh's somethin' 'bout um makes me feel's if I ain' got no right to look at um even."

The porter thought a moment.

"I don' believe it'll do yuh any good, suh, to try to shine up to tha' young lady. She ain' the sawt, I can tell yuh that. I done see too many guhls in ma time——"

"What are you talking about? I am not trying to shine up to her. I only want to know who she is—just out of curiosity." Grenfall's face was a trifle red.

"Beg pahdon, suh; but I kind o' thought you was like oth' gent'men when they see a han'some woman.

Allus wants to fin' out somethin' 'bout huh, suh, yuh know. 'Scuse me foh misjedgin' yuh, suh. Th' lady in question is a foh'ner—she lives across th' ocean, 's fuh as I can fin' out. They's in a hurry to git home foh some reason, 'cause they ain' goin' to stop this side o' New York, 'cept to change cahs."

"Where do they change cars?"

"St. Louis—goin' by way of Cincinnati an' Wash-in'ton."

Grenfall's ticket carried him by way of Chicago. He caught himself wondering if he could exchange his ticket in St. Louis.

"Traveling with her father and mother, I suppose?"

"No, suh; they's huh uncle and aunt. I heah huh call 'em uncle an' aunt. Th' ole gent'man is Uncle Caspar. I don' know what they talk 'bout. It's mostly some foh'en language. Th' young lady allus speaks Amehican to me, but th' old folks cain't talk it ver' well. They all been to 'Frisco, an' the hired he'p they's got with 'em say they been to Mexico, too. Th' young lady's got good Amehican dollahs, don' care wha' she's been. She allus smiles when she ask me to do anythin', an' I wouldn' care if she nevah tipped me, 's long as she smiles thataway."

"Servants with them, you say?"

"Yas, suh; man an' woman, nex' section t'other side of ole folks. Can't say mor'n fifteen words in

Amehican. Th' woman is huh maid, an' the man he's the gen'ral hustler for th' hull pahty."

"And you don't know her name?"

"No, suh, an' I cain't ver' well fin' out."

"In what part of Europe does she live?"

"Australia, I think, suh."

"You mean Austria."

"Do I? 'Scuse ma ig'nance. I was jis' guessin' at it anyhow; one place's as good as 'nother ovah thuh, I reckon."

"Have you one of those dollars she gave you?"

"Yes, suh. Heh's a coin that ain' Amehican, but she says it's wuth seventy cents in our money. It's a foh'en piece. She tell me to keep it till I went ovah to huh country; then I could have a high time with it—that's what she says—'a high time'—an' smiled kind o' knowin' like."

"Let me see that coin," said Lorry eagerly taking the silver piece from the porter's hand. "I never saw one like it before. Greek, it looks to me, but I can't make a thing out of these letters. She gave it to you?"

"Yas, suh—las' evenin'. A high time on seventy cents. That's reediculous, ain' it?" demanded the porter scornfully.

"I'll give you a dollar for it. You can have a higher time on that."

The odd little coin changed owners immediately. and the new possessor dropped it into his pocket

with the inward conviction that he was the silliest fool in existence. After the porter's departure he took the coin from his pocket, and with his back to the door, his face to the window, studied its lettering.

During the afternoon he strolled about the train, his hand constantly jingling the coins. He passed her compartment several times, yet refrained from looking in. But he wondered if she saw him pass.

At one little station a group of Indian bear hunters created considerable interest among the passengers. Grenfall was down at the station platform at once, looking over a great stack of game. As he left the car he met Uncle Caspar, who was hurrying toward his niece's section. A few moments later she came down the steps, followed by the dignified old gentleman. Grenfall tingled with a strange delight as she moved quite close to his side in her desire to see. Once he glanced at her face; there was a pretty look of fear in her eyes as she surveyed the massive bears and the stark, stiff antelopes. But she laughed as she turned away with her uncle.

Grenfall was smoking his cigarette and vigorously jingling the coins in his pocket when the train pulled out. Then he swung on the car steps and found himself at her feet. She was standing at the top, where she had lingered a moment. There was an expression of anxiety in her eyes as he

looked up into them, followed instantly by one of relief. Then she passed into the car. She had seen him swing upon the moving steps and had feared for his safety—had shown in her glorious face that she was glad he did not fall beneath the wheels. Doubtless she would have been as solicitous had he been the porter or the brakeman, he reasoned, but that she had noticed him at all pleased him.

At Abilene he bought the Kansas City newspapers. After breakfast he found a seat in the observation car and settled himself to read. Presently some one took a seat behind him. He did not look back, but unconcernedly cast his eyes upon the broad mirror in the opposite car wall. Instantly he forgot his paper. She was sitting within five feet of him, a book in her lap, her gaze bent briefly on the flitting buildings outside. He studied the reflection furtively until she took up the book and began to read. Up to this time he had wondered why some nonsensical idiot had wasted looking-glasses on the walls of a railway coach; now he was thinking of him as a far-sighted man.

The first page of his paper was fairly alive with fresh and important dispatches, chiefly foreign. At length, after allowing himself to become really interested in a Paris dispatch of some international consequence, he turned his eyes again to the mirror. She was leaning slightly forward, holding the open

book in her lap, but reading, with straining eyes, an article in the paper he held.

He calmly turned to the next page and looked leisurely over it. Another glance, quickly taken, showed to him a disappointed frown on the pretty face and a reluctant resumption of novel reading. A few moments later he turned back to the first page, holding the paper in such a position that she could not see, and, full of curiosity, read every line of the foreign news, wondering what had interested her.

Under ordinary circumstances Lorry would have offered her the paper, and thought nothing more of it. With her, however, there was an air that made him hesitate. He felt strangely awkward and inexperienced beside her; precedents did not seem to count. He arose, tossed the paper over the back of the chair as if casting it aside forever, and strolled to the opposite window and looked out for a few moments, jingling his coins carelessly. The jingle of the pieces suggested something else to him. His paper still hung invitingly, upside down, as he had left it, on the chair, and the lady was pouring over her novel. As he passed her he drew his right hand from his pocket and a piece of money dropped to the floor at her feet. Then began an embarrassed search for the coin—in the wrong direction, of course. He knew precisely where it had rolled, but purposely looked under the seats on the other side of the car. She drew her skirts aside and assisted

in the search. Four different times he saw the little piece of money, but did not pick it up. Finally, laughing awkwardly, he began to search on her side of the car. Whereupon she rose and gave him more room. She became interested in the search and bent over to scan the dark corners with eager eyes. Their heads were very close together more than once. At last she uttered an exclamation, and her hand went to the floor in triumph. They arose together, flushed and smiling. She had the coin in her hand.

"I have it," she said, gaily, a delicious foreign tinge to the words.

"I thank you——" he began, holding out his hand as if in a dream of ecstacy, but her eyes had fallen momentarily on the object of their search.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, the prettiest surprise in the world coming into her face. It was a coin from her faraway homeland, and she was betrayed into the involuntary exclamation. Instantly, however, she regained her composure and dropped the piece into his outstretched hand, a proud flush mounting to her cheek, a look of cold reserve to her eyes. He had hoped she would offer some comment on what she must have considered a strange coincidence, but he was disappointed. He wondered if she even heard him say:

"I am sorry to have troubled you."

She had resumed her seat, and, to him, there seemed a thousand miles between them. Feeling de-

cidedly uncomfortable and not a little abashed, he left her and strode to the door. Again a mirror gave him a thrill. This time it was the glass in the car's end. He had taken but half a dozen steps when the brown head was turned slyly and a pair of interested eyes looked after him. She did not know that he could see her, so he had the satisfaction of observing that pretty, puzzled face plainly until he passed through the door.

Grenfall had formed many chance acquaintances during his travels, sometimes taking risks and liberties that were refreshingly bold. He had seldom been repulsed, strange to say, and as he went to his section dizzily, he thought of the good fortune that had been his in other attempts, and asked himself why it had not occurred to him to make the same advances in the present instance. Somehow she was different. There was that strange dignity, that pure beauty, that imperial manner, all combining to forbid the faintest thought of familiarity.

He was more than astonished at himself for having tricked her a few moments before into a perfectly natural departure from indifference. She had been so reserved and so natural that he looked back and asked himself what had happened to flatter his vanity except a passing show of interest. With this, he smiled and recalled similar opportunities in days gone by, all of which had been turned to advantage and had resulted in amusing pastimes. And here

was a pretty girl with an air of mystery about her, worthy of his best efforts, but toward whom he had not dared to turn a frivolous eye.

He took out the coin and leaned back in his chair, wondering where it came from. "In any case," he thought, "it'll make a good pocket-piece and some day I'll find some idiot who knows more about geography than I do." Mr. Lorry's own ideas of geography were jumbled and vague—as if he had got them by studying the labels on his hat-box. He knew the places he had been to, and he recognized a new country by the annoyances of the customs house, but beyond this his ignorance was complete. The coin, so far as he knew, might have come from any one of a hundred small principalities scattered about the continent. Yet it bothered him a little that he could not tell which one. He was more than curious about a very beautiful young woman—in fact, he was undeniably interested in her. He pleasantly called himself an "ass" to have his head turned by a pretty face, a foreign accent and an insignificant coin, and yet he was fascinated.

Before the train reached St. Louis he made up his mind to change cars there and go to Washington with her. It also occurred to him that he might go on to New York if the spell lasted. During the day he telegraphed ahead for accommodations; and when the flyer arrived in St. Louis that evening he hurriedly attended to the transferring and rechecking of

his baggage, bought a new ticket, and dined. At eight he was in the station, and at 8:15 he passed her in the aisle. She was standing in her stateroom door, directing her maid. He saw a look of surprise flit across her face as he passed. He slept soundly that night, and dreamed that he was crossing the ocean with her.

At breakfast he saw her, but if she saw him it was when he was not looking at her. Once he caught Uncle Caspar staring at him through his monocle, which dropped instantly from his eye in the manner that is always self-explanatory. She had evidently called the uncle's attention to him, but was herself looking sedately from the window when Lorry unfortunately spoiled the scrutiny. His spirits took a furious bound with the realization that she had deigned to honor him by recognition, if only to call attention to him because he possessed a certain coin.

Once the old gentleman asked him the time of day and set his watch according to the reply. In Ohio the man-servant scowled at him because he involuntarily stared after his mistress as she paced the platform while the train waited at a station. Again, in Ohio, they met in the vestibule, and he was compelled to step aside to allow her to pass. He did not feel particularly jubilant over this meeting; she did not even glance at him.

Lorry realized that his opportunities were fast

disappearing, and that he did not seem to be any nearer meeting her than when they started. He had hoped to get Uncle Caspar into a conversation and then use him, but Uncle Caspar was as distant as an iceberg. "If there should be a wreck," Grenfall caught himself thinking, "then my chance would come; but I don't see how Providence is going to help me in any other way."

Near the close of the day, after they left St. Louis, the train began to wind through the foothills of the Alleghenies. Bellaire, Grafton and other towns were left behind, and they were soon whirling up the steep mountain, higher and higher, through tunnel after tunnel, nearer and nearer to Washington every minute. As they were pulling out of a little mining town built on the mountain side, a sudden jar stopped the train. There was some little excitement and a scramble for information. Some part of the engine was disabled, and it would be necessary to replace it before the "run" could proceed.

Lorry strolled up to the crowd of passengers who were watching the engineer and fireman at work. A clear, musical voice, almost in his ear, startled him, for he knew to whom it belonged. She addressed the conductor, who, impatient and annoyed, stood immediately behind him.

"How long are we to be delayed?" she asked. Just two minutes before this same conductor had responded most ungraciously to a simple question

Lorry had asked and had gone so far as to instruct another inquisitive traveler to go to a warmer climate because he persisted in asking for information which could not be given except by a clairvoyant. But now he answered in most affable tones:

"We'll be here for thirty minutes at least, Miss—perhaps longer."

She walked away, after thanking him, and Grenfall looked at his watch.

Off the main street of the town ran little lanes leading to the mines below. They all ended at the edge of a steep declivity. There was a drop of almost four hundred feet straight into the valley below. Along the sides of this valley were the entrances to the mines. Above, on the ledge, was the machinery for lifting the ore to the high ground on which stood the town and railroad yards.

Down one of these streets walked a young lady, curiously interested in all about her. She seemed glad to escape from the train and its people, and she hurried along, the fresh spring wind blowing her hair from beneath her cap, the ends of her long coat fluttering.

Lorry stood on the platform watching her; then he lighted a cigarette and followed. He had a vague feeling that she ought not to be alone with all the workmen. She started to come back before he reached her, however, and he turned again toward the station. Then he heard a sudden whistle, and

a minute later from the end of the street he saw the train pulling out. Lorry had rather distinguished himself in college as a runner, and instinctively he dashed up the street, reaching the tracks just in time to catch the railing of the last coach. But there he stopped and stood with thumping heart while the coaches slid smoothly up the track, leaving him behind. He remembered that he was not the only one left, and he panted and smiled. It occurred to him—when it was too late—that he might have got on the train and pulled the rope or called the conductor, but that was out of the question now. After all, it might not be such a merry game to stay in that filthy little town; it did not follow that she would prove friendly.

A few moments later she appeared—wholly unconscious of what had happened. A glance down the track and her face was the picture of despair.

Then she saw him coming toward her with long strides, flushed and excited. Regardless of appearances, conditions or consequences, she hurried to meet him.

"Where is the train?" she gasped, as the distance between them grew short, her blue eyes seeking his beseechingly, her hands clasped.

"It has gone."

"Gone? And we—we are left?"

He nodded, delighted by the word "we."

"The conductor said thirty minutes; it has been

but twenty," she cried, half tearfully, half angrily, looking at her watch. Oh, what shall I do?" she went on, distractedly. He had enjoyed the sweet, despairing tones, but this last wail called for manly and instant action.

"Can we catch the train? We must! I will give one thousand dollars. I must catch it." She had placed her gloved hand against a telegraph pole to steady her trembling, but her face was resolute, imperious, commanding. She was ordering him to obey as she would have commanded a slave. In her voice there was authority, in her eye there was fear. She could control the one but not the other.

"We cannot catch the flyer. I want to catch it as much as you and"—here he straightened himself—"I would add a thousand to yours." He hesitated a moment—thinking. "There is but one way, and no time to lose."

With this he turned and ran rapidly toward the little depot and telegraph office.

II

TWO STRANGERS IN A COACH

Lorry wasted very little time. He dashed into the depot and up to the operator's window.

"What's the nearest station east of here?"

"P——," leisurely answered the agent, in some surprise.

"How far is it?"

"Four miles."

"Telegraph ahead and hold the train that just left here."

"The train don't stop there."

"It's got to stop there—or there'll be more trouble than this road has had since it began business. The conductor pulled out and left two of his passengers —gave out wrong information, and he'll have to hold his train there or bring her back here. If you don't send that order I'll report you as well as the conductor." Grenfall's manner was commanding. The agent's impression was that he was important—that he had a right to give orders. But he hesitated.

"There's no way for you to get to P—— any-

way," he said, while turning the matter over in his mind.

"You stop that train! I'll get there inside of twenty minutes. Now, be quick! Wire them to hold her—or there'll be an order from headquarters for some ninety-day lay-offs." The agent stared at him; then turned to his instrument, and the message went forward. Lorry rushed out. On the platform he nearly ran over the hurrying figure in the tan coat.

"Pardon me. I'll explain things in a minute," he gasped and dashed away. Her troubled eyes blinked with astonishment.

At the end of the platform stood a mountain coach, along the sides of which was printed in yellow letters: "Happy Springs." The driver was climbing up to his seat and the cumbersome trap was empty.

"Want to make ten dollars?" cried Grenfall.

"What say?" demanded the driver, half falling to the ground.

"Get me to P—— inside of twenty minutes, and I'll give you ten dollars. Hurry up! Answer!"

"Yes, but, you see, I'm hired to——"

"Oh, that's all right! You'll never make money easier. Can you get us there in twenty minutes?"

"It's four mile, pardner, and not very good road, either. Pile in, and we'll make it er kill old Hip and Jim. Miss the train?"

"Get yourself ready for a race with an express train and don't ask questions. Kill 'em both if you have to. I'll be back in a second!"

Back to the station he tore. She was standing near the door, looking up the track miserably. Already night was falling. Men were lighting the switch lanterns and the mountains were turning into great dark shadows.

"Come quickly; I have a wagon out here."

Resistlessly she was hurried along and fairly shoved through the open door of the odd-looking coach. He was beside her on the seat in an instant, and her bewildered ears heard him say:

"Drive like the very deuce!" Then the door slammed, the driver clattered up to his seat, and the horses were off with a rush.

"Where are we going?" she demanded, sitting very straight and defiant.

"After that train. I'll tell you all about it when I get my breath. This is to be the quickest escape from a dilemma on record—providing it is an escape." By this time they were bumping along the flinty road at a lively rate, jolting about on the seat in a most disconcerting manner. After a few long, deep breaths he told her how the ride in the Springs hack had been conceived and of the arrangement he had made with the despatcher. He furthermore acquainted her with the cause of his being left when he might have caught the train.

"Just as I reached the track, out of breath but rejoicing, I remembered having seen you on that side street, and knew that you would be left. It would have been heartless to leave you here without protection, so I felt it my duty to let the train go and help you out of a very ugly predicament."

"How can I ever repay you?" she murmured. "It was so good and so thoughtful of you. Oh, I should have died had I been left alone. Do you not think my uncle will miss me and have the train sent back?" she went on, sagely.

"That's so!" he exclaimed, somewhat disconcerted. "But I don't know, either. He may not miss you for a long time, thinking you are in some other car, you know. That could easily happen," triumphantly.

"Can this man get us to the next station in time?" she questioned, looking at the black mountains and the dense foliage. It was now quite dark.

"If he doesn't bump us to death before we get half way there. He's driving like the wind."

"You must let me pay half his bill," she said, decidedly, from the dark corner in which she was huddling.

He could find no response to this peremptory request.

"The road is growing rougher. If you will allow me to make a suggestion, I think you will see its wisdom. You can escape a great deal of ugly jost-

ling if you will take hold of my arm and cling to it tightly. I will brace myself with this strap. I am sure it will save you many hard bumps."

Without a word she moved to his side and wound her strong little arm about his big one.

"I had thought of that," she said, simply. "Thank you." Then, after a moment, while his heart thumped madly: "Had it occurred to you that after you ran so hard you might have climbed aboard the train and ordered the conductor to stop it for me?"

"I—I never thought of that!" he cried confusedly.

"Please do not think me ungrateful. You have been very good to me, a stranger. One often thinks afterward of things one might have done, don't you know? You did the noblest when you inconvenienced yourself for me. What trouble I have made for you." She said this so prettily that he came gaily from the despondency into which her shrewdness, bordering on criticism, had thrown him. He knew perfectly well that she was questioning his judgment and presence of mind, and, the more he thought of it, the more transparent became the absurdity of his action.

"It has been no trouble," he floundered. "An adventure like this is worth no end of—er—inconvenience, as you call it. I'm sure I must have lost my head completely, and I am ashamed of myself. How much anxiety I could have saved you had I been possessed of an ounce of brains!"

"Hush! I will not allow you to say that. You would have me appear ungrateful when I certainly am not. Ach, how he is driving! Do you think it dangerous?" she cried, as the hack gave two or three wild lurches, throwing him into the corner, and the girl half upon him.

"Not in the least," he gasped, the breath knocked out of his body. Just the same, he was very much alarmed. It was as dark as pitch outside and in, and he could not help wondering how near the edge of the mountain side they were running. A false move of the flying horses and they might go rolling to the bottom of the ravine, hundreds of feet below. Still, he must not let her see his apprehension. "This fellow is considered the best driver in the mountains," he prevaricated. Just then he remembered having detected liquor on the man's breath as he closed the door behind him. Perhaps he was intoxicated!

"Do you know him?" questioned the clear voice, her lips close to his ear, her warm body pressing against his.

"Perfectly. He is no other than Light-horse Jerry, the king of stage drivers." In the darkness he smiled to himself maliciously.

"Oh, then we need fear no alarm," she said, reassured, not knowing that Jerry existed only in the yellow-backed novel her informant had read when a boy.

There was such a roaring and clattering that con-

versation became almost impossible. When either spoke it was with the mouth close to the ear of the other. At such times Grenfall could feel her breath on his cheek. Her sweet voice went tingling to his toes with every word she uttered. He was in a daze, out of which sung the mad wish that he might clasp her in his arms, kiss her, and then go tumbling down the mountain. She trembled in the next fierce lurches, but gave forth no complaint. He knew that she was in terror but too brave to murmur.

Unable to resist, he released the strap to which he had clung so grimly, and placed his strong, firm hand encouragingly over the little one that gripped his arm with the clutch of death. It was very dark and very lonely, too.

"Oh!" she cried, as his hand clasped hers. "You must hold to the strap."

"It is broken!" he lied, gladly. "There is no danger. See! My hand does not tremble, does it? Be calm! It cannot be much farther."

"Will it not be dreadful if the conductor refuses to stop?" she cried, her hand resting calmly beneath its protector. He detected a tone of security in her voice.

"But he will stop! Your uncle will see to that, even if the operator fails."

"My uncle will kill him if he does not stop or come back for me," she said, complacently.

"I was not wrong," thought Grenfall; "he looks

like a duelist. Who the devil are they, anyhow?" Then aloud: "At this rate we'd be able to beat the train to Washington in a straight-away race. Isn't it a delightfully wild ride?"

"I have acquired a great deal of knowledge in America, but this is the first time I have heard your definition of delight. I agree that it is wild."

For some moments there was silence in the noisy conveyance. Outside, the crack of the driver's whip, his hoarse cries, and the nerve-destroying crash of the wheels produced impressions of a mighty storm rather than of peace and pleasure.

"I am curious to know where you obtained the coin you lost in the car yesterday," she said at last, as if relieving her mind of a question that had been long subdued.

"The one you so kindly found for me?" he asked, procrastinatingly.

"Yes. They are certainly rare in this country."

"I never saw a coin like it until after I had seen you," he confessed. He felt her arm press his a little tighter, and there was a quick movement of her head which told him, dark as it was, that she was trying to see his face and that her blue eyes were wide with something more than terror.

"I do not understand," she exclaimed.

"I obtained the coin from a sleeping-car porter who said some one gave it to him and told him to

have a 'high time' with it," he explained in her ear.

"He evidently did not care for the 'high time,'" she said, after a moment. He would have given a fortune for one glimpse of her face at that instant.

"I think he said it would be necessary to go to Europe in order to follow the injunction of the donor. As I am more likely to go to Europe than he, I relieved him of the necessity and bought his right to a 'high time.'"

There was a long pause, during which she attempted to withdraw herself from his side, her little fingers struggling timidly beneath the big ones.

"Are you a collector of coins?" she asked at length, a perceptible coldness in her voice.

"No. I am considered a dispenser of coins. Still, I rather like the idea of possessing this queer bit of money as a pocket-piece. I intend to keep it forever, and let it descend as an heirloom to the generations that follow me," he said, laughingly. "Why are you so curious about it?"

"Because it comes from the city and country in which I live," she responded. "If you were in a land far from your own would you not be interested in anything—even a coin—that reminded you of home?"

"Especially if I had not seen one of its kind since leaving home," he replied, insinuatingly.

"Oh, but I have seen many like it. In my purse there are several at this minute."

"Isn't it strange that this particular coin should have reminded you of home?"

"You have no right to question me, sir," she said, coldly, drawing away, only to be lurched back again In spite of herself she laughed audibly.

"I beg your pardon," he said, tantalizingly.

"When did he give it to you?"

"Who?"

"The porter, sir."

"You have no right to question me," he said.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I did not mean to be inquisitive."

"But I grant the right. He gave it me inside of two hours after I first entered the car."

"At Denver?"

"How do you know I got on at Denver?"

"Why, you passed me in the aisle with your luggage. Don't you remember?"

Did he remember! His heart almost turned over with the joy of knowing that she had really noticed and remembered him Involuntarily his glad fingers closed down upon the gloved hand that lay beneath them.

"I believe I do remember, now that you speak of it," he said, in a stifled voice. "You were standing at a window?"

"Yes; and I saw you kissing those ladies good-

bye, too. Was one of them your wife, or were they all your sisters? I have wondered."

"They—they were—cousins," he informed her, confusedly, recalling an incident that had been forgotten. He *had* kissed Mary Lyons and Edna Burrage—but their brothers were present. "A foolish habit, isn't it?"

"I do not know. I have no grown cousins," she replied, demurely. "You Americans have such funny customs, though. Where I live, no gentleman would think of pressing a lady's hand until it pained her. Is it necessary?" In the question there was a quiet dignity, half submerged in scorn, so pointed, so unmistakable that he flushed, turned cold with mortification, and hastily removed the amorous fingers.

"I crave your pardon. It is such a strain to hold myself and you against the rolling of this wagon that I unconsciously gripped your hand harder than I knew. You—you will not misunderstand my motive?" he begged, fearful lest he had offended her by his ruthlessness.

"I could not misunderstand something that does not exist," she said, simply, proudly.

"By Jove, she's beyond comparison!" he thought.

"You have explained, and I am sorry I spoke as I did. I shall not again forget how much I owe you."

"Your indebtedness, if there be one, does not deprive you of the liberty to speak to me as you will.

You could not say anything unjust without asking my forgiveness, and when you do that you more than pay the debt. It is worth a great deal to me to hear you say that you owe something to me, for I am only too glad to be your creditor. If there *is* a debt, you shall never pay it; it is too pleasant an account to be settled with 'you're welcome.' If you insist that you owe much to me, I shall refuse to cancel the debt, and allow it to draw interest forever."

"What a financier!" she cried. "That jest was worthy of a courtier's deepest flattery. Let me say that I am proud to owe my gratitude to you. You will not permit it to grow less."

"That was either irony or the prettiest speech a woman ever uttered," he said, warmly. "I also am curious about something. You were reading over my shoulder in the observation car——"

"I was not!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "How did you know that?" she inconsistently went on.

"You forget the mirror on the opposite side of the car."

"Ach, now I *am* offended."

"With a poor old mirror? For shame! Yet, in the name of our American glass industry, I ask your forgiveness. It shall not happen again. You will admit that you were trying to read over my shoulder. Thanks for that immutable nod. Well, I am curious to know what you were so eager to read."

"Since you presume to believe the mirror instead of me, I will tell you. There was a despatch on the first page that interested me deeply."

"I believe I thought as much at the time. Oh, confound this road!" For half a mile or more the road had been fairly level, but, as the ejaculation indicates, a rough place had been reached. He was flung back in the corner violently, his head coming in contact with a sharp projection of some kind. The pain was almost unbearable, but it was eased by the fact that she had involuntarily thrown her arm across his chest, her hand grasping his shoulder spasmodically.

"Oh, we shall be killed!" she half shrieked. "Can you not stop him? This is madness—madness!"

"Pray be calm! I was to blame, for I had become careless. He is earning his money, that's all. It was not stipulated in the contract that he was to consider the comfort of his passengers." Grenfall could feel himself turn pale as something warm began to trickle down his neck. "Now tell me which despatch it was. I read all of them."

"You did? Of what interest could they have been?"

"Curiosity does not recognize reason."

"You read every one of them?"

"Assuredly."

"Then I shall grant you the right to guess which

interested me the most. You Americans delight in puzzles, I am told."

"Now, that is unfair."

"So it is. Did you read the despatch from Constantinople?" Her arm fell to her side suddenly as if she had just realized its position.

"The one that told of the French ambassador's visit to the Sultan?"

"Concerning the small matter of a loan of some millions—Yes. Well, that was of interest to me, inasmuch as the loan, if made, will affect my country."

"Will you tell me what country you are from?"

"I am from Graustark."

"Yes; but I don't remember where that is."

"Is it possible that your American schools do not teach geography? Ours tell us where the United States are located."

"I confess ignorance," he admitted.

"Then I shall insist that you study a map. Graustark is small, but I am as proud of it as you are of this great broad country that reaches from ocean to ocean. I can scarcely wait until I again see our dear crags and valleys, our rivers and ever-blue skies, our plains and our towns. I wonder if you worship your country as I love mine."

"From the tenor of your remarks, I judge that you have been away from home for a long time," he volunteered.

"We have seen something of Asia, Australia,

Mexico and the United States since we left Edelweiss, six months ago. Now we are going home—home!" She uttered the words so lovingly, so longingly, so tenderly, that he envied the homeland.

There was a long break in the conversation, both evidently wrapped in thought which could not be disturbed by the whirl of the coach. He was wondering how he could give her up, now that she had been tossed into his keeping so strangely. She was asking herself over and over again how so thrilling an adventure would end.

They were sore and fatigued with the strain on nerve and flesh. It was an experience never to be forgotten, this romantic race over the wild mountain road, the result still in doubt. Ten minutes ago—strangers; now—friends at least, neither knowing the other. She was admiring him for his generalship, his wonderful energy; he was blessing the fate that had come to his rescue when hope was almost dead. He could scarcely realize that he was awake. Could it be anything but a vivid fancy from which he was to awaken and find himself alone in his berth, the buzzing, clacking car-wheels piercing his ears with sounds so unlike those that had been whispered into them by a voice, sweet and maddening, from out of the darkness of a dreamland cab?

"Surely we must be almost at the end of this awful ride," she moaned, yielding completely to the long suppressed alarm. "Every bone in my body

aches. What shall we do if they have not held the train?"

"Send for an undertaker," he replied grimly, seeing policy in jest. They were now ascending an incline, bumping over boulders, hurtling through treacherous ruts and water-washed holes, rolling, swinging, jerking, crashing. "You have been brave all along; don't give up now. It is almost over. You'll soon be with your friends."

"How can I thank you?" she cried, gripping his arm once more. Again his hand dropped upon hers and closed gently.

"I wish that I could do a thousand times as much for you," he said, thrillingly, her disheveled hair touching his face, so close were his lips. "Ah, the lights of the town!" he cried an instant later. "Look!"

He held her so that she could peer through the rattling glass window. Close at hand, higher up the steep, many lights were twinkling against the blackness.

Almost before they realized how near they were to the lights, the horses began to slacken their speed, a moment later coming to a standstill. The awful ride was over.

"The train! the train!" she cried, in ecstacy "Here, on the other side. Thank heaven!"

He could not speak for the joyful pride that dis-

tended his heart almost to bursting. The coach door flew open, and Light-horse Jerry yelled:

"Here y'are! I made her!"

"I should say you did!" exclaimed Grenfall, climbing out and drawing her after him gently. "Here's your ten."

"I must send you something, too, my good fellow," cried the lady. "What is your address—quick?"

"William Perkins, O——, West Virginny, ma'am."

Lorry was dragging her toward the cars as the driver completed the sentence. Several persons were running down the platform, dimly lighted from the string of car windows. She found time to pant as they sped along:

"He was not Light-horse Jerry, at all!"

III

MISS GUGGENSLOCKER

He laughed, looking down into her serious upturned face. A brief smile of understanding flitted across her lips as she broke away from him and threw herself into the arms of tall, excited Uncle Caspar. The conductor, several trainmen and a few eager passengers came up, the former crusty and snappish.

"Well, get aboard!" he growled. "We can't wait all night."

The young lady looked up quickly, her sensitive face cringing beneath the rough command. Lorry stepped instantly to the conductor's side, shook his finger vigorously under his nose, and exclaimed in no uncertain tones:

"Now, that's enough from you! If I hear another word out of you, I'll make you sweat blood before to-morrow morning. Understand, my friend."

"Aw, who are you?" demanded the conductor, belligerently.

"You'll learn that soon enough. After this you'll

have sense enough to find out whom you are talking to before you open that mouth of yours. Not another word!" Mr. Grenfall Lorry was not president of the road, nor was he in any way connected with it, but his well-assumed air of authority caused the trainman's ire to dissolve at once.

"Excuse me, sir. I've been worried to death on this run. I meant no offence. That old gentleman has threatened to kill me. Just now he took out his watch and said if I did not run back for his niece in two minutes he'd call me out and run me through. I've been nearly crazy here. For the life of me, I don't see how you happened to be——"

"Oh, that's all right. Let's be off," cried Lorry, who had fallen some distance behind his late companion and her uncle. Hurrying after them, he reached her side in time to assist her in mounting the car steps.

"Thank you," smiling down upon him bewitchingly. At the top of the steps she was met by her aunt, behind whom stood the anxious man-servant and the maid. Into the coach she was drawn by the relieved old lady, who was critically inspecting her personal appearance when Lorry and the foreigner entered.

"Ach, it was so wild and exhilarating, Aunt Yvonne," the girl was saying, her eyes sparkling. She stood straight and firm, her chin in the air, her hands in those of her aunt. The little traveling cap

was on the side of her head, her hair was loose and very much awry, strands straying here, curls blowing there in utter confusion. Lorry fairly gasped with admiration for the loveliness that would not be vanquished.

"We came like the wind! I shall never, never forget it!" she said.

"But how could you have remained there, child? Tell me how it happened. We have been frantic," said her aunt, half in English, half in German.

"Not now, dear Aunt Yvonne. See my hair! What a fright I must be! Fortunate man, your hair cannot be so unruly as mine. Oh!" The exclamation was one of alarm. In an instant she was at his side, peering with terrified eyes at the blood-stains on his neck and face. "It is blood! You are hurt! Uncle Caspar, Hedrick—quick! Attend him! Come to my room at once. You are suffering. Minna, find bandages!"

She dragged him to the door of her section before he could interpose a remonstrance.

"It is nothing—a mere scratch. Bumped my head against the side of the coach. Please don't worry about it; I can care for myself. Really, it doesn't——"

"But it does! It has bled terribly. Sit there! Now, Hedrick, some water."

Hedrick rushed off and was back in a moment with a basin of water, a sponge and a towel, and be-

fore Grenfall fully knew what was happening, the man-servant was bathing his head, the others looking on anxiously, the young lady apprehensively, her hands clasped before her as she bent over to inspect the wound above his ear.

"It is quite an ugly cut," said Uncle Caspar, critically. "Does it pain you, sir?"

"Oh, not a great deal," answered Lorry, closing his eyes comfortably. It was all very pleasant, he thought.

"Should it not have stitches, Uncle Caspar?" asked the sweet, eager voice.

"I think not. The flow is staunched. If the gentleman will allow Hedrick to trim the hair away for a plaster and then bandage it I think the wound will give him no trouble." The old man spoke slowly and in very good English.

"Really, Uncle, is it not serious?"

"No, no," interposed Grenfall Lorry. "I knew it was a trifle. You cannot break an American's head. Let me go to my own section and I'll be ready to present myself as good as new, in ten minutes."

"You must let Hedrick bandage your head," she insisted. "Go with him, Hedrick."

Grenfall arose and started toward his section, followed by Hedrick.

"I trust you were not hurt during that reckless ride," he said, more as a question, stopping in the aisle to look back at her.

"I should have been a mass of bruises, gashes and lumps had it not been for one thing," she said, a faint flush coming to her cheek, although her eyes looked unfaltering into his. "Will you join us in the dining car? I will have a place prepared for you at our table."

"Thank you. You are very good. I shall join you as soon as I am presentable."

"We are to be honored, sir," said the old gentleman, but in such a way that Grenfall had a distinct feeling that it was he who was to be honored. Aunt Yvonne smiled graciously, and he took his departure. While Hedrick was dressing the jagged little cut, Grenfall complacently surveyed the patient in the mirror opposite, and said to himself a hundred times: "You lucky dog! It was worth forty gashes like this. By Jove, she's divine!"

In a fever of eager haste he bathed and attired himself for dinner, the imperturbable Hedrick assisting. One query filled the American's mind: "I wonder if I am to sit beside her." And then: "I have sat beside her! There can never again be such delight!"

It was seven o'clock before his rather unusual toilet was completed. "See if they have gone to dinner, Hedrick," he said to the man-servant, who departed ceremoniously.

"I don't know why he should be so damned polite," observed Lorry, gazing wonderingly after him.

"I'm not a king. That reminds me. I must introduce myself. She doesn't know me from Adam."

Hedrick returned and announced that they had just gone to the dining car and were awaiting him there. He hurried to the dinner and made his way to their table. Uncle Caspar and his niece were facing him as he came up between the tables, and he saw, with no little regret, that he was to sit beside the aunt—directly opposite the girl, however. She smiled up at him as he stood before them, bowing. He saw the expression of injury in those deep, liquid eyes of violet as their gaze wandered over his hair.

"Your head? I see no bandage," she said, reproachfully.

"There is a small plaster and that is all. Only heroes may have dangerous wounds," he said, laughingly.

"Is heroism in America measured by the number of stitches or the size of the plaster?" she asked. pointedly. "In my country it is a joy, and not a calamity. Wounds are the misfortune of valor. Pray, be seated, Mr. Lorry—is it not?" she said, pronouncing it quaintly.

He sat down rather suddenly on hearing her utter his name. How had she learned it? Not a soul on the train knew it, he was sure.

"I am Caspar Guggenslocker. Permit me, Mr. Lorry, to present my wife and my niece, Miss Gug-

genslocker," said the uncle, more gracefully than he had ever heard such a thing uttered before.

In a daze, stunned by the name,—Guggenslocker, —mystified over their acquaintance with his own when he had been foiled at every fair attempt to learn theirs, Lorry could only mumble his acknowledgments. In all his life he had never lost command of himself as at this moment. Guggenslocker! He could feel the dank sweat of disappointment starting on his brow. A butcher,—a beer maker,—a cobbler,—a gardener,—all synonyms of Guggenslocker. A sausage manufacturer's niece—Miss Guggenslocker! He tried to glance unconcernedly at her as he took up his napkin, but his eyes wavered helplessly. She was looking serenely at him, yet he fancied he saw a shadow of mockery in her blue eyes.

"If you were a novel writer, Mr. Lorry, what manner of heroine would you choose?" she asked, with a smile so tantalizing that he understood instinctively why she was reviving a topic once abandoned. His confusion was increased. Her uncle and aunt were regarding him calmly,—expectantly, he imagined.

"I—I have no ambition to be a novel writer," he said, "so I have not made a study of heroines."

"But you would have an ideal," she persisted.

"I'm sure I—I don't—that is, she would not necessarily be a heroine. Unless, of course, it would

require heroism to pose as an ideal for such a prosaic fellow as I."

"To begin with, you would call her Clarabel Montrose or something equally as impossible. You know the name of a heroine in a novel must be euphonious. That is an exacting rule." It was an open taunt, and he could see that she was enjoying his discomfiture. It aroused his indignation and his wits.

"I would first give my hero a distinguished name. No matter what the heroine's name might be—pretty or otherwise—I could easily change it to his in the last chapter." She flushed beneath his now bright, keen eyes and the ready, though unexpected retort. Uncle Caspar placed his napkin to his lips and coughed. Aunt Yvonne studiously inspected her bill of fare. "No matter what you call a rose, it is always sweet," he added, meaningly.

At this she laughed good-naturedly. He marveled at her white teeth and red lips. A rose, after all. Guggenslocker, rose; rose, not Guggenslocker. No, no! A rose only! He fancied he caught a sly look of triumph in her uncle's swift glance toward her. But Uncle Caspar was not a rose—he was Guggenslocker. Guggenslocker—butcher! Still, he did not look the part—no, indeed. That extraordinary man a butcher, a gardener, a—and Aunt Yvonne? Yet they were Guggenslockers.

"Here is the waiter," the girl observed, to his re-

lief. "I am famished after my pleasant drive. It was so bracing, was it not, Mr. Grenfall Lorry?"

"Give me a mountain ride always as an appetizer," he said, obligingly, and so ended the jest about a name.

The orders for the dinner were given and the quartette sat back in their chairs to await the coming of the soup. Grenfall was still wondering how she had learned his name, and was on the point of asking several times during the conventional discussion of the weather, the train and the mountains. He considerately refrained, however, unwilling to embarrass her.

"Aunt Yvonne tells me she never expected to see me alive after the station agent telegraphed that we were coming overland in that awful old carriage. The agent at P—— says it is a dangerous road, at the very edge of the mountain. He also increased the composure of my uncle and aunt by telling them that a wagon rolled off yesterday, killing a man, two women and two horses. Dear Aunt Yvonne, how troubled you must have been."

"I'll confess there were times when I thought we were rolling down the mountain," said Lorry, with a relieved shake of the head.

"Sometimes I thought we were soaring through space, whether upward or downward, I could not tell. We never failed to come to earth, though, did we?" she laughingly asked.

"Emphatically! Earth and a little grief," he said, putting his hand to his head.

"Does it pain you?" she asked, quickly.

"Not in the least. I was merely feeling to see if the cut were still there. Mr.—Mr. Guggenslocker, did the conductor object to holding the train?" he asked, remembering what the conductor had told him of the old gentleman's actions.

"At first, but I soon convinced him that it should be held," said the other, quietly.

"My husband spoke very harshly to the poor man," added Aunt Yvonne. "But I am afraid, Caspar, he did not understand a word you said. You were very much excited." The sweet old lady's attempts at English were much more laborious than her husband's.

"If he did not understand my English, he was very good at guessing," said her husband, grimly.

"He told me you had threatened to call him out," ventured the young man.

"Call him out? Ach, a railroad conductor!" exclaimed Uncle Caspar, in fine scorn.

"Caspar, I heard you say that you would call him out," interposed his wife, with reproving eyes.

"Ach, God! I have made a mistake! I see it all! It was the other word I meant—*down* not *out*. I intended to call him down, as you Americans say. I hope he will not think I challenged him." He was very much perturbed.

"I think he was *afraid* you would," said Lorry.

"He should never fear. I could not meet a railroad conductor. Will you please tell him I could not so condescend? Besides, dueling is murder in your country, I am told."

"It usually is, sir. Much more so than in Europe." The others looked at him inquiringly. "I mean that in America when two men pull their revolvers and go to shooting at each other, some one is killed—frequently both. In Europe, as I understand it, a scratch with the sword ends the combat."

"You have been misinformed," exclaimed Uncle Caspar, his eyebrows elevated.

"Why, Uncle Caspar has fought more duels than he can count," cried the girl, proudly.

"And has he slain his man every time?" asked Grenfall, smilingly, glancing from one to the other. Aunt Vvonne shot a reproving look at the girl, whose face paled instantly, her eyes going quickly in affright to the face of her uncle.

"God!" Lorry heard the old gentleman mutter. He was looking at his bill of fare, but his eyes were fixed and staring. The card was crumpling between the long, bony fingers. The American realized that a forbidden topic had been touched upon.

"He has fought and he has slain," he thought as quick as a flash. "He is no butcher, no gardener, no cobbler. That's certain!"

"Tell us, Uncle Caspar, what you said to the conductor," cried the young lady, nervously.

"Tell them, Caspar, how alarmed we were," added soft-voiced Aunt Yvonne. Grenfall was a silent, interestcd spectator. He somehow felt as if a scene from some tragedy had been reproduced in that briefest of moments. Calmly and composedly, a half-smile now on his face, the soldierly Caspar narrated the story of the train's run from one station to the other.

"We did not miss you until we had almost reached the other station. Then your Aunt Yvonne asked me where you had gone. I told her I had not seen you, but went into the coach ahead to search. You were not there. Then I went on to the dining car. Ach, you were not there. In alarm I returned to our car. Your aunt and I looked everywhere. You were not anywhere. I shall never forget your aunt's face when she sank into a chair. nor shall I feel again so near like dying as when she suggested that you might have fallen from the train. I sent Hedrick ahead to summon the conductor, but he had hardly left us when the engine whistled sharply and the train began to slow up in a jerky fashion. We were very pale as we looked at each other, for something told us that the stop was unusual. I rushed to the platform, meeting Hedrick, who was as much alarmed as I. He said the train had been flagged, and that there must be

something wrong. Your aunt came out and told me that she had made a strange discovery."

Grenfall observed that he was addressing himself exclusively to the young lady.

"She had found that the gentleman in the next section was also missing. While we were standing there in doubt and perplexity, the train came to a standstill, and soon there was shouting on the outside. I climbed down from the car and saw that we were at a little station. The conductor came running toward me excitedly.

" 'Is the young lady in the car?' he asked.

" 'No. For Heaven's sake, what have you heard?' I cried.

" 'Then she has been left at O——,' he exclaimed, and used some very extraordinary American words.

"I then informed him that he should run back for you, first learning that you were alive and well. He said he would be damned if he would—pardon the word, ladies. He was very angry, and said he would give orders to go ahead, but I told him I would demand restitution of his government. He laughed in my face, and then I became shamelessly angry. I said to him:

" 'Sir, I shall call you down—not out, as you have said—and I shall run you through the mill.'

"That was good American talk, sir, was it not, Mr. Lorry? I wanted him to understand me, so I tried to use your very best language. Some gentle-

men who are traveling on this train and some very excellent ladies also joined in the demand that the train be held. His despatch from O—— said that you, Mr. Lorry, insisted on having it held for twenty minutes. The conductor insulted you, sir, by saying that you had more—ah, what is it?—gall than any idiot he had ever seen. When he said that, although I did not fully understand that it was a reflection on you, so ignorant am I of your language, I took occasion to tell him that you were a gentleman and a friend of mine. He asked me your name, but, as I did not know it, I could only tell him that he would learn it soon enough. Then he said something which has puzzled me ever since. He told me to close my face. What did he mean by that, Mr. Lorry?"

"Well, Mr. Guggenslocker, that means in refined American, 'stop talking,'" said Lorry, controlling a desire to shout.

"Ach, that accounts for his surprise when I talked louder and faster than ever. I did not know what he meant. He said positively he would not wait, but just then a second message came from the other station. I did not know what it was then, but a gentleman told me that it instructed him to hold the train if he wanted to hold his job. Job is situation, is it not? Well, when he read that message he said he would wait just twenty minutes. I asked him to tell me how you were coming to us,

but he refused to answer. Your aunt and I went at once to the telegraph man and implored him to tell us the truth, and he said you were coming in a carriage over a very dangerous road. Imagine our feelings when he said some people had been killed yesterday on that very road. He said you would have to drive like the—the very devil if you got here in twenty minutes."

"We did, Uncle Caspar," interrupted Miss Guggenslocker, naïvely. "Our driver followed Mr. Lorry's instructions."

Mr. Grenfall Lorry blushed and laughed awkwardly. He had been admiring her eager face and expressive eyes during Uncle Caspar's recital. How sweet her voice when it pronounced his name, how charming the foreign flavor to the words.

"He would not have understood if I had said other things," he explained, hastily.

"When your aunt and I returned to the train we saw the conductor holding his watch. He said to me: 'In just three minutes we pull out. If they are not here by that time they can get on the best they know how. I've done all I can.' I did not say a word, but went to my section and had Hedrick get out my pistols. If the train had left before you arrived it would be without its conductor. In the meantime, your Aunt Yvonne was pleading with the wretch. I hastened back to his side with my pistols in my pocket. It was then that I told him to start the train if he dared. That man will never

know how close he was to death. One minute passed, and he coolly announced that but one minute was left. I had made up my mind to give him one of my pistols when the time was up, and to tell him to defend himself. It was not to be a duel, for there was nothing regular about it. It was only a question as to whether the train should move. Then came the sound of carriage wheels and galloping horses. Almost before we knew it you were with us. I am so happy that you were not a minute later."

There was something so cool and grim in the quiet voice, something so determined in those brilliant eyes, that Grenfall felt like looking up the conductor to congratulate him. The dinner was served, and while it was being discussed his fair companion of the drive graphically described the experience of twenty strange minutes in a shackle-down mountain coach. He was surprised to find that she omitted no part, not even the hand clasp or the manner in which she clung to him. His ears burned as he listened to this frank confession, for he expected to hear words of disapproval from the uncle and aunt. His astonishment was increased by their utter disregard of these rather peculiar details. It was then that he realized how trusting she had been, how serenely unconscious of his tender and sudden passion. And had she told her relatives that she had kissed him, he firmly believed they would have smiled approvingly. Somehow the real

flavor of romance was stricken from the ride by her candid admissions. What he had considered a romantic treasure was being calmly robbed of its glitter, leaving for his memory the blurr of an adventure in which he had played the part of a gallant gentleman and she a grateful lady. He was beginning to feel ashamed of the conceit that had misled him. Down in his heart he was saying: "I might have known it. I did know it. She is not like other women." The perfect confidence that dwelt in the rapt faces of the others forced into his wondering mind the impression that this girl could do no wrong.

"And, Aunt Yvonne," she said, in conclusion, "the luck which you say is mine as birthright asserted itself. I escaped unhurt, while Mr. Lorry alone possesses the pain and unpleasantness of our ride."

"I possess neither," he objected. "The pain that you refer to is a pleasure."

"The pain that a man endures for a woman should always be a pleasure," said Uncle Caspar, smilingly.

"But it could not be a pleasure to him unless the woman considered it a pain," reasoned Miss Guggenslocker. "He could not feel happy if she did not respect the pain."

"And encourage it," supplemented Lorry, dryly. "If you do not remind me occasionally that I am hurt, Miss Guggenslocker, I am liable to forget it."

To himself he added: "I'll never learn how to say it in one breath."

"If I were not so soon to part from you I should be your physician, and, like all physicians, prolong your ailment interminably," she said, prettily.

"To my deepest satisfaction," he said, warmly, not lightly. There was nothing further from his mind than servile flattery, as his rejoinder might imply. "Alas!" he went on, "we no sooner meet than we part. May I ask when you are to sail?"

"On Thursday," replied Mr. Guggenslocker.

"On the Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse," added his niece, a faraway look coming into her eyes.

"We are to stop off one day, to-morrow, in Washington," said Aunt Yvonne, and the jump that Lorry's heart gave was so mighty that he was afraid they could see it in his face.

"My uncle has some business to transact in your city, Mr. Lorry. We are to spend to-morrow there and Wednesday in New York. Then we sail. Ach, how I long for Thursday!" His heart sank like lead to the depths from which it had sprung. It required no effort on his part to see that he was alone in his infatuation. Thursday was more to her than his existence; she could forget him and think of Thursday, and when she thought of Thursday, the future, he was but a thing of the past, not even of the present.

"Have you always lived in Washington, Mr. Lorry?" asked Mrs. Guggenslocker.

"All my life," he replied, wishing at that moment that he was homeless and free to choose for himself.

"You Americans live in one city and then in another," she said. "Now, in our country generation after generation lives and dies in one town. We are not migratory."

"Mr. Lorry has offended us by not knowing where Graustark is located on the map," cried the young lady, and he could see the flash of resentment in her eyes.

"Why, my dear sir, Graustark is in——" began Uncle Caspar, but she checked him instantly.

"Uncle Caspar, you are not to tell him. I have recommended that he study geography and discover us for himself. He should be ashamed of his ignorance."

He was not ashamed, but he mentally vowed that before he was a day older he would find Graustark on the map and would stock his negligent brain with all that history and the encyclopedia had to say of the unknown land. Her uncle laughed, and, to Lorry's disappointment, obeyed the young lady's command.

"Shall I study the map of Europe, Asia or Africa?" asked he, and they laughed

"Study the map of the world," said Miss Guggenslocker, proudly.

"Edelweiss is the capital?"

"Yes, our home city,—the queen of the crags,"

cried she. "You should see Edelweiss, Mr. Lorry. It is of the mountain, the plain and the sky. There are homes in the valley, homes on the mountain side and homes in the clouds."

"And yours? From what you say it must be above the clouds—in heaven."

"We are farthest from the clouds, for we live in the green valley, shaded by the white topped mountains. We may, in Edelweiss, have what climate we will. Doctors do not send us on long journeys for our health. They tell us to move up or down the mountain. We have balmy spring, glorious summer, refreshing autumn and chilly winter, just as we like."

"Ideal! I think you must be pretty well toward the south. You could not have July and January if you were far north."

"True; yet we have January in July. Study your map. We are discernible to the naked eye," she said, half ironically.

"I care not if there are but three inhabitants of Graustark, all told, it is certainly worthy of a position on any map," said Lorry, gallantly; and his listeners applauded with patriotic appreciation. "By the way, Mr. Gug—Guggenslocker, you say the conductor asked you for my name and you did not know it. May I ask you how you learned it later on?" His curiosity got the better of him, and his courage was increased by the champagne the old gentleman had ordered.

"I did not know your name until my niece told it

to me after your arrival in the carriage," said Uncle Caspar.

"I don't remember giving it to Miss Guggenslocker at any time," said Lorry.

"You were not my informant," she said, demurely.

"Surely you did not guess it."

"Oh, no, indeed. I am no mind reader."

"My own name was the last thing you could have read in my mind, in that event, for I have not thought of it in three days."

She was sitting with her elbows on the table, her chin in her hands, a dreamy look in her blue eyes.

"You say you obtained that coin from the porter on the Denver train?"

"Within two hours after I got aboard."

"Well that coin purchased your name for me," she said, calmly, candidly. He gasped.

"You—you don't mean that you——" he stammered.

"You see, Mr. Lorry, I wanted to know the name of a man who came nearest my ideal of what an American should be. As soon as I saw you I knew that you were *the* American as I had grown to know him through the books,—big, strong, bold and comely. That is why I bought your name of the porter. I shall always say that I know the name of an ideal American,—Grenfall Lorry."

The ideal American was not unmoved. He was

in a fever of fear and happiness,—fear because he thought she was jesting, happiness because he hoped she was not. He laughed awkwardly, absolutely unable to express himself in words. Her frank statement staggered him almost beyond the power of recovery. There was joy in the knowledge that she had been attracted to him at first sight, but there was bitterness in the thought that he had come to her notice as a sort of specimen, the name of which she had sought as a botanist would look for the name of an unknown flower.

"I—I am honored," he at last managed to say, his eyes gleaming with embarrassment. "I trust you have not found your first judgment a faulty one." He felt very foolish after this flat remark.

"I have remembered your name," she said, graciously. His heart swelled.

"There are a great many better Americans than I," he said. "You forget our President and our statesmen."

"I thought they were mere politicians."

Grenfall Lorry, idealized, retired to his berth that night, his head whirling with the emotions inspired by this strange, beautiful woman. How lovely, how charming, how naïve, how queenly, how indifferent how warm, how cold—how everything that puzzled him was she. His last waking thought was:

"Guggenslocker! An angel with a name like that!"

IV

THE INVITATION EXTENDED

They were called by the porter early the next morning. The train was pulling into Washington, five hours late. Grenfall wondered, as he dressed, whether fortune would permit him to see much of her during her brief day in the capital. He dreamed of a drive over the avenues, a trip to the monument, a visit to the halls of congress, an inspection of public buildings, a dinner at his mother's home, luncheon at the Ebbitt, and other attentions which might give to him every moment of her day in Washington. But even as he dreamed, he was certain that his hopes could not be gratified.

After the train had come to a standstill he could hear the rustle of her garments in the next compartment. Then he heard her sweep into the passage, greet her uncle and aunt, utter a few commands to the maid, and, while he was adjusting his collar and necktie, pass from the car. No man ever made quicker time in dressing than did Lorry. She could hardly have believed him ideal had she seen his scowling face or heard the words that hissed through his impatient teeth.

"She'll get away, and that'll be the end of it," he

growled, seizing his traps and rushing from the train two minutes after her departure. The porter attempted to relieve him of his bags on the platform, but he brushed him aside and was off toward the station.

"Nice time for you to call a man, you idiot," was his parting shot for the porter, forgetting, of course, that the foreigners had been called at the same time. With eyes intent on the crowd ahead, he plunged along, seeing nobody in his disappointed flight. "I'll never forgive myself if I miss her," he was wailing to himself. She was not to be seen in the waiting-rooms, so he rushed to the sidewalk.

"Baggage transferred?"

"Cab, sir?"

"Go to the devil—yes, here! Take these traps and these checks and rush my stuff to No. ———, W——— Avenue. Trunks just in on B. & O.," he cried, tossing his burdens to a transfer man and giving him the checks so quickly that the fellow's sleepy eyes opened wider than they had been for a month. Relieved of his impedimenta, he returned to the station.

"Good morning, Mr. Lorry. Are you in too much of a hurry to see your friends?" cried a clear, musical voice, and he stopped as if shot. The anxious frown flew from his brow and was succeeded instantaneously by a glad smile. He wheeled and beheld her, with Aunt Yvonne, standing near the main entrance to the station. "Why, good morn-

ing," he exclaimed, extending his hand gladly. To his amazement she drew herself up haughtily and ignored the proffered hand. Only for a brief second did this strange and uncalled-for hauteur obtain. A bright smile swept over her face, and her repentant fingers sought his timidly, even awkwardly. Something told him that she was not accustomed to handshaking; that same something impelled him to bend low and touch the gloved fingers with his lips. He straightened, with face flushed, half fearful lest his act had been observed by curious loungers, and he had taken the liberty in a public place which could not be condoned. But she smiled serenely, approvingly. There was not the faintest sign of embarrassment or confusion in the lovely face. Any other girl in the world, he thought, would have jerked her hand away and giggled furiously. Aunt Yvonne inclined her head slightly, but did not proffer her hand. He wisely refrained from extending his own. "I thought you had left the station," he said.

"We are waiting for Uncle Caspar, who is giving Hedrick instructions. Hedrick, you know, is to go on to New York with our boxes. He will have them aboard ship when we arrive there. All that we have with us is hand luggage. We leave Washington to-night."

"I had hoped you might stay over a few days."

"It is urgent business that compels us to leave so hastily, Mr. Lorry. Of all the cities in the world,

I have most desired to see the capital of your country. Perhaps I may return some day. But do not let us detain you, if you are in a hurry."

He started, looked guilty, stammered something about baggage, said he would return in a moment, and rushed aimlessly away, his ears fiery.

"I'm all kinds of a fool," he muttered, as he raced around the baggage-room and then back to where he had left the two ladies. Mr. Guggenslocker had joined them and they were preparing to depart. Miss Guggenslocker's face expressed pleasure at seeing him.

"We thought you would never return, so long were you gone," she cried, gaily. He had been gone just two minutes by the watch! The old gentleman greeted him warmly, and Lorry asked them to what hotel they were going. On being informed that they expected to spend the day at the Ebbitt, he volunteered to accompany them, saying that he intended to breakfast there. Quicker than a flash a glance, unfathomable as it was brief, passed between the three, not quickly enough, however, to escape his keen, watchful eyes, on the alert since the beginning of his acquaintance with them, in conjunction with his ears, to catch something that might satisfy, in a measure, his burning curiosity. What was the meaning of that glance? It half angered him, for in it he thought he could distinguish annoyance, apprehension, dismay or something equally disquieting. Before he could stiffen his long frame and

give vent to the dignified reconsideration that flew to his mind, the young lady dispelled all pain and displeasure, sending him into raptures, by saying:

"How good of you! We shall be so delighted to have you breakfast with us, Mr. Lorry, if it is convenient for you. You can talk to us of your wonderful city. Now, say that you will be good to us; stay your hunger and neglect your personal affairs long enough to give us these early morning hours. I am sure we cannot trouble you much longer."

He expostulated gallantly and delightedly, and then hurried forth to call a cab. At eight o'clock he breakfasted with them, his infatuation growing deeper and stronger as he sat for the hour beneath the spell of those eyes, the glorious face, the sweet, imperial air that was a part of her, strange and unaffected. As they were leaving the dining-room, he asked her if she would not drive with him.

His ardent gallantry met with a surprising rebuke. The conversation up to that moment had been bright and cheery, her face had been the constant reflector of his own good spirits, and he had every reason in the world to feel that his suggestion would be received with pleasure. It was a shock to him, therefore, to see the friendly smile fade from her eyes and a disdainful gleam succeed it. Her voice, a moment ago sweet and affable, changed its tone instantly to one so proud and arrogant that he could scarcely believe his ears.

"I shall be engaged during the entire day, Mr.

Lorry," she said, slowly, looking him fairly in the eyes with cruel positiveness. Those eyes of his were wide with surprise and the glowing gleam of injured pride. His lips closed tightly; little red spots flew to his cheeks and then disappeared, leaving his face white and cold; his heart throbbed painfully with mingled emotions of shame and anger. For a moment he dared not speak.

"I have reason to feel thankful that you are to be engaged," he said at last, calmly, without taking his eyes from hers. "I am forced to believe, much to my regret, that I have offended when I intended to please. You will pardon my temerity."

There was no mistaking the resentment in his voice or the glitter in his eyes. Impulsively her little hand was stretched forth, falling upon his arm, while into her eyes came again the soft glow and to her lips the most pathetic, appealing smile, the forerunner of a pretty plea for forgiveness. The change startled and puzzled him more than ever. In one moment she was unreasonably rude and imperious, in the next gracious and imploring.

"Forgive me," she cried, the blue eyes battling bravely against the steel in the grey ones above. "I was so uncivil! Perhaps I cannot make you understand why I spoke as I did, but, let me say, I richly deserved the rebuke. Pray forgive me and forget that I have been disagreeable. Do not ask me to tell you why I was so rude to you just now, but overlook my unkind treatment of your invitation.

Please, Mr. Lorry, I beg of you—I beg for the first time in my life. You have been so good to me; be good to me still."

His wrath melted away like snow before the sunshine. How could he resist such an appeal? "I beg for the first time in my life," whirled in his brain. What did she mean by that?

"I absolve the penitent," he said, gravely.

"I thank you. You are still my ideal American—courteous, bold and gentle. I do not wonder that Americans can be masterful men. And now I thank you for your invitation, and ask you to let me withdraw my implied refusal. If you will take me for the drive, I shall be delighted and more than grateful."

"You make me happy again," he said, softly, as they drew near the elder members of the party, who had paused to wait for them. "I shall ask your uncle and aunt to accompany us."

"Uncle Caspar will be busy all day, but I am sure my aunt will be charmed. Aunt Yvonne, Mr. Lorry has asked us to drive with him over the city, and I have accepted for you. When are we to start, Mr. Lorry?"

Mr. and Mrs. Guggenslocker stared in a bewildered sort of manner at their niece. Then Aunt Yvonne turned questioning eyes toward her husband, who promptly bowed low before the tall American, and said:

"Your kind offices shall never be forgotten, sir. When are the ladies to be ready?"

Lorry was weighing in his mind the advisability of asking them to dine in the evening with his mother, but two objections presented themselves readily. First, he was afraid of this perverse maid; second, he had not seen his mother. In fact, he did not know that she was in town.

"At two o'clock, I fancy. That will give us the afternoon. You leave at nine to-night, do you not?"

"Yes. And will you dine with us this evening?" Her invitation was so unexpected, in view of all that had happened, that he looked askance. "Ach, you must not treat my invitation as I did yours!" she cried, merrily, although he could detect the blush that returns with the recollection of a reprimand. "You should profit by what I have been taught." The girl abruptly threw her arm about her aunt and cried, as she drew away in the direction of her room: "At two, then, and at dinner this evening. I bid you good morning, Mr. Lorry."

The young man, delighted with the turn of affairs, but dismayed by what seemed a summary dismissal, bowed low. He waited until the strange trio entered the elevator and then sauntered downstairs, his hands in his pockets, his heart as light as air. Unconsciously he jingled the coins. A broad smile came over his face as he drew forth a certain piece.

Holding it between his thumb and forefinger, he said:

"You are what it cost her to learn my name, are you? Well, my good fellow, you may be very small, but you bought something that looks better than Guggenslocker on a hotel register. Your mistress is an odd bit of humanity, a most whimsical bit, I must say. First, she's no and then she's yes. You're lucky, my coin, to have fallen into the custody of one who will not give you over to the mercy of strangers for the sake of a whim. You are now retired on a pension, well deserved after valiant service in the cause of a most capricious queen."

In an hour he was at home and relating to his mother the story of his wanderings, neglecting, for reasons best known to himself, the events which occurred after Denver had been left behind, except for casual allusion to "a party of foreigners." At one o'clock, faultlessly attired, he descended to the brougham, telling Mrs. Lorry that he had invited some strangers to see the city. On the way downtown he remembered that he was in business—the law business—and that it would be well to drop in and let his uncle know he was in the city. On second thought, however, he concluded it was too near two o'clock to waste any time on business, so the office did not know that he was in town until the next day, and then to no great extent.

For several hours he reveled in her society, sitting beside her in the roomy brougham, Aunt

Yvonne opposite, explaining to her the many places of interest as they passed. They entered the Capitol; they saw the White House, and, as they were driving back to the hotel, passed the President of the United States.

Miss Guggenslocker, when informed that the President's carriage was approaching, relaxed gracefully from the stately reserve that had been puzzling him, and revealed an eager curiosity. Her eyes fastened themselves upon the President, Lorry finding entertainment in the changes that came over her unconscious face. Instead of noting the veneration he had expected, he was astonished and somewhat provoked to see a slight curl of disgust at the corners of her mouth, a pronounced disappointment in her eyes. Her face expressed ridicule, pure and simple, and, he was shocked to observe, the exposure was unconscious, therefore sincere.

"You do not like our ruler?" he said, as the carriage whirled by. He was returning his hat to his head as he spoke.

"I cannot say. I do not know him," she replied, a tinge of sarcasm in her voice. "You Americans have one consolation; when you tire of a ruler you can put another in his place. Is it not wise to do so quite often?"

"I don't think wise is the word. Expedient is better. I am to infer that you have no politics."

"One house has ruled our land for centuries. Since I came to your land I have not once seen a

man wave his hat with mad adulation and cry from his heart: 'Long live the President!' For centuries, in my country, every child has been born with the words: 'Long live the Prince!' in his heart, and he learns to say them next after the dear parental words are mastered. 'Long live the Prince!' 'Long live the Princess!' are tributes of love and honor that greet our rulers from birth to death. We are not fickle, and we have no politics."

"Do your rulers hear tin horns, brass bands, campaign yells, firecrackers and stump speeches every four years? Do they know what it means to be the voluntary choice of a whole nation? Do they know what it is to rule because they have won the right and not because they were born to it? Has there ever been a homage-surfeited ruler in your land who has known the joy that comes with the knowledge that he has earned the right to be cheered from one end of the country to the other? Is there not a difference between your hereditary 'Long live the Prince' and our wild, enthusiastic, spontaneous 'Hurrah for Cleveland!' Miss Guggenslocker? All men are equal at the beginning in our land. The man who wins the highest gift that can be bestowed by seventy millions of people is the man who had brains and not title as a birthright." He was a bit exasperated.

"There! I have displeased you again. You must pardon my antiquated ideas. We, as true and loyal subjects of a good sovereign, cannot forget that our

rulers are born, not made. Perhaps we are afflicted at times with brainless monarchs and are to be pitied. You are generous in your selection of potentates, be generous, then, with me, a benighted royalist, who craves leniency of one who may some day be President of the United States."

"Granted, without discussion. As possible, though not probable, President of the United States. I am magnanimous to an unfortunate who can never hope to be princess, no matter how well she might grace the gilded throne."

She greeted this glowing remark with a smile so intoxicating that he felt himself the most favored of men. He saw that smile in his mind's eye for months afterward, that maddening sparkle of joy, which flashed from her eyes to the very bottom of his heart, there to snuggle forever with Memory's most priceless treasures.

Their dinner was but one more phase of this fascinating dream. More than once he feared that he was about to awake to find bleak unhappiness where exquisite joy had reigned so gloriously. As it drew to an end a sense of depression came over him. An hour at most was all that he could have with her. Nine o'clock was drawing nigh with its regrets, its longings, its desolation. He determined to retain the pleasures of the present until, amid the clanging of bells and the roll of car wheels, the dismal future began. His intention to accompany them to the station was expressed as they were leaving the table.

She had begun to say good-bye to him when he interrupted, self-consciousness forcing the words hurriedly and disjointedly from his lips:

"You will let me go to the station with you. I shall—er—deem it a pleasure."

She raised her eyebrows slightly, but thanked him and said she would consider it an honor. His face grew hot and his heart cold with the fancy that there was in her eyes a gleam which said: "I pity you, poor fellow."

Notwithstanding his strange misgiving and the fact that his pride had sustained quite a perceptible shock, he drove with them to the station. They went to the sleeping car a few minutes before the time set for the train's departure, and stood at the bottom of the steps, uttering the good-byes, the God speeds and the sincere hope that they might meet again. Then came the sharp activity of the trainmen, the hurry of belated passengers. He glanced soberly at his watch.

"It is nine o'clock. Perhaps you would better get aboard," he said, and proceeded to assist Aunt Yvonne up the steps. She turned and pressed his hand gently before passing into the car.

"Adieu, good friend. You have made it so very pleasant for us," she said, earnestly.

The tall, soldierly old gentleman was waiting to assist his niece into the coach.

"Go first, Uncle Caspar," the girl made Lorry happy by saying. "I can easily come up unaided."

"Or I can assist her," Lorry hastened to add, giving her a grateful look which she could not misunderstand. The uncle shook hands warmly with the young man and passed up the steps. She was following when Lorry cried:

"Will you not allow me?"

She laughingly turned to him from the steps and stretched forth her hand.

"And now it is good-bye forever. I am so sorry that I have not seen more of you," she said. He took her hand and held it tightly for a moment.

"I shall never forget the past few days," he said, a thrill in his voice. "You have put something into my life that can never be taken away. You will forget me before you are out of Washington, but I—I shall always see you as you are now."

She drew her hand away gently, but did not take her eyes from his upturned face.

"You are mistaken. Why should I forget you—ever? Are you not the ideal American whose name I bought? I shall always remember you as I saw you—at Denver."

"Not as I have been since?" he cried.

"Have you changed since first I saw you?" she asked, quaintly.

"I have, indeed, for you saw me before I saw you. I am glad I have not changed for the worse in your eyes."

"As I first knew you with my eyes I will say that they are trustworthy," she said, tantalizingly,

"I do not mean that I have changed externally."

"In any other case my eyes would not serve," she cried, with mock disappointment. "Still," she added, sweepingly, "you are my ideal American. Good-bye! The man has called 'All aboard!' "

"Good-bye!" he cried, swinging up on the narrow step beside her. Again he clasped her hand, as she drew back in surprise. "You are going out of my land, but not out of my mind. If you wish your eyes to see the change in me, you have only to look at them in a mirror. *They* are the change—they themselves! Good-bye! I hope that I may see you again."

She hesitated an instant, her eyes wavering beneath his. The train was moving slowly now.

"I pray that we may meet," she said, softly, at last,—so softly that he barely heard the words. Had she uttered no sound he could have been sure of her response, for it was in her telltale eyes. His blood leaped madly. "You will be hurt if you wait till the train is running at full speed," she cried, suddenly returning to the abandoned merry mood. She pushed him gently in her excitement. "Don't you see how rapidly we are moving? Please go!" There was a terror in her eyes that pleased him.

"Good-bye, then," he cried.

"Adieu, my American," she cried, quickly.

As he swung out, ready to drop to the ground, she said, her eyes sparkling with something that sug-

gested mischief, her face more bewitching than ever under the flicker of the great arc lights:

"You must come to Edelweiss to see me. I shall expect you!" He thought there was a challenge in the tones. Or was it mockery?

"I will, by heaven, I will!" he exclaimed.

A startled expression flashed across her face, and her lips parted as if in protestation. As she leaned forward, holding stoutly to the hand-rail, there was no smile on her countenance.

A white hand fluttered before his eyes, and she was gone. He stood, hat in hand, watching the two red lights at the end of the train until they were lost in the night.

V

SENTIMENTAL EXCHANGE

If Lorry slept that night he was not aware of it. The next morning, after he had breakfasted with his mother, he tried in vain to recall a minute of the time between midnight and eight a. m. in which he did not think of the young woman who had flown away with his tranquility. All night long he tossed and thought. He counted ten thousand black sheep jumping over a pasture fence, but, after the task was done and the sheep had scattered, he was as far from sleep as ever. Her face was everywhere. Her voice filled his ear with music never-ceasing, but it was not the lulling music that invites drowsiness. He heard the clock strike the hours from one to eight, when he arose, thoroughly disgusted with himself. Everything seemed to taste bitter or to look blue. That breakfast was a great strain on his natural politeness. He worshipped his mother, but in several instances that morning he caught himself just in time to prevent the utterance of some sharp rejoinder to her pleasant, motherly queries. Twice she was compelled to repeat questions, his mind being so far away that he heard nothing save words that another woman had uttered, say twenty-

four hours before. His eyes were red, and there was a heavy droop to the lids; his tones were drawling and his voice strangely without warmth; his face was white and tired.

"You are not well, Grenfall," his mother said, peering anxiously into his eyes. "The trip has done you up. Now, you must take a good, long rest and recover from your vacation."

He smiled grimly.

"A man never needs a rest so much as he does at the end of his vacation, eh, mother? Well, work will be restful. I shall go to the office this morning and do three days' work before night. That will prove to you that I am perfectly well."

He made a pretense of reading the morning paper. There was nothing to interest him on those cold, commonplace pages, not one thing—but wait! A thought struck him suddenly, and for ten minutes he searched the columns assiduously, even nervously. Then he threw down the paper with a sigh of relief.

There was nothing to indicate that her train had been wrecked. She had undoubtedly reached New York in safety. He looked at his watch. She was probably enjoying her breakfast at that very moment. Perhaps she was thinking of him and—perhaps not. The memory of the last tender hand clasp and the soft glow in her eyes stood like a wall between the fear that she had forgotten and the certainty that she remembered. Had not this memory

kept him awake? That and the final, mysterious emotion which had shown itself in her face as he had last looked upon it? A thousand times had he pondered over the startled look and the signs of agitation. Was it fear? Was it dismay? Was it renunciation? Whatever it was, it sorely disturbed him; it had partly undone the charm of the moment before—the charm that could not and would not be gainsaid.

True to his intention, he went to the office early, virtuously inclined to work. His uncle greeted him warmly and a long conference over business affairs followed. To Lorry's annoyance and discomfiture, he found himself frequently inattentive. Several important cases were pending, and in a day or two they were to go into court with a damage suit of more than ordinary consequence. Lorry, senior, could not repress his gratification over the return of his clever, active nephew at such an opportune time. He had felt himself unable to handle the case alone; the endurance of a young and vigorous mind was required for the coming battle in chancery.

They lunched together, the elder eager and confidential, the other respectful and—absent-minded. In the afternoon the junior went over the case, and renewed search for authorities and opinions, fully determined to be constant in spite of his inclination to be fickle. Late in the day he petulantly threw

aside the books, curtly informed his astonished uncle that he was not feeling well, and left the office. Until dinner time he played billiards atrociously at his club; at dinner his mother sharply reproved him for flagrant inattentions; after dinner he smoked and wondered despondently. To-morrow she was to sail! If he could but see her once more!

At 7:30 his mother found him in the library, searching diligently through the volume of the encyclopedia that contained the G's. When she asked what he was looking for he laughed idiotically, and, in confusion, informed her that he was trying to find the name of the most important city in Indiana. She was glancing at the books in the case when she was startled by hearing him utter an exclamation and then leap to his feet.

"Half-past seven! I can make it!"

"What is the matter, Gren, dear?"

"Oh!" he ejaculated, bringing himself up with a start. "I forgot—er—yes, mother, I'll just have time to catch the train, you know. Will you kindly have Mary clean up this muss of books and so forth? I'm off, you see, to New York—for a day only, mother,—back to-morrow! Important business—just remembered it, you know,—ahem! Good-bye, mother! Good-bye!" He had kissed her and was in the hall before she fairly understood what he was talking about. Then she ran after him, gaining the hallway in time to see him pass

through the street door, his hat on the side of his head, his overcoat fluttering furiously as he shoved his arms into the sleeves. The door slammed, and he was off to New York.

The train was ready to pull out when he reached the station, and it was only by a hard run that he caught the last platform, panting but happy. Just twenty-four hours before she had left Washington, and it was right here that she had smiled and said she would expect him to come to Edelweiss. He had had no time to secure a berth in the sleeper, but was fortunately able to get one after taking the train. Grenfall went to sleep, feeling both disappointed and disgusted. Disappointed because of his submission to sentiment; disgusted because of the man who occupied the next section. A man who is in love and in doubt has no patience with the prosaic wretch who can sleep so audibly.

After a hasty breakfast in New York he telephoned to the steamship company's pier and asked the time of sailing for the Kaiser Wilhelm. On being informed that the ship was to cast off at her usual hour, he straightway called a cab and was soon bowling along toward the busy waterway. Directly he sat bolt upright, rigid and startled to find himself more awakened to the realization of his absurd action. Again it entered his infatuated head that he was performing the veriest schoolboy trick in rushing to a steamship pier in the hope of catch-

ing a final, and at best, unsatisfactory glimpse of a young woman who had appealed to his sensitive admiration. A love-sick boy could be excused for such a display of imbecility, but a man—a man of the world! Never!

"The idea of chasing down to the water's edge to see that girl is enough to make you ashamed of yourself for life, Grenfall Lorry," he apostrophized. "It's worse than any love-sick fool ever dreamed of doing. I am blushing, I'll be bound. The idiocy, the rank idiocy of the thing! And suppose she should see me staring at her out there on the pier? What would she think of me? I'll not go another foot! I won't be a fool!"

He was excited and self-conscious and thoroughly ashamed of the trip into which his impetuous adoration had driven him. Just as he was tugging at the door in the effort to open it that he might order the driver to take him back to the hotel, a sly tempter whispered something in his ear; his fancy was caught, and he listened:

"Why not go down to the pier and look over the passenger list, just to see if she has been booked safely? That would be perfectly proper and sensible, and besides it will be a satisfaction to know that she gets off all right. Certainly! There's nothing foolish in that. . . . Especially as I am right on the way there. . . . And as I have come so far . . . there's no sense in going

back without seeing whether she has secured passage. . . . I can find out in a minute and then go home. . . . There won't be anything wrong in that. And then I may have a glimpse of her before the ship leaves the pier. She must not see me, of course. Never! She'd laugh at me! How I'd hate to see her laughing at me!" Then, sinking back again with a smile of justification on his face, he muttered: "We won't turn back; we'll go right ahead. We'll be a kind of a fool, but not so foolish as to allow her to see us and recognize us as one."

Before long they arrived at the wharf, and he hurried to the office near by. The clerk permitted him to look over the list. First he ran through the first-class passengers, and was surprised to find that there was no such name as Guggenslocker in the list. Then he went over the second-class, but still no Guggenslocker.

"Hasn't Mr. Guggenslocker taken passage?" he demanded, unwilling to believe his eyes.

"Not on the Kaiser Wilhelm, sir."

"Then, by George, they'll miss the boat!" Lorry exclaimed. "Maybe they'll be here in a few minutes."

"They can't get anything but steerage now, sir. Everything else is gone."

"Are you sure they haven't taken passage?" asked the bewildered Lorry, weakly.

"You can see for yourself," answered the young man, curtly.

Lorry was again in a perspiration, this time the result of a vague, growing suspicion that had forced itself into his mind. He wandered aimlessly away, his brain a chaos of speculation. The suspicion to which he had given countenance grew, and as it enlarged he suffered torment untold. Gradually he came to the conclusion that she had fooled him, had lied to him. She did not intend to sail on the Wilhelm, at all. It was all very clear to him now, that strangeness in her manner, those odd occasional smiles. What was she? An adventuress! That sweet-faced girl a little ordinary coquette, a liar? He turned cold with the thought. Nor was she alone in her duplicity. Had not her uncle and aunt been as ready to deceive him? Were they trying to throw him off their track for some subtle purpose? Had they done something for which they were compelled to fly the country as quickly as possible? No! Not that! They certainly were not fleeing from justice. But why were they not on board the Kaiser Wilhelm?

Suddenly he started as if he had been struck, and an involuntary exclamation of pain and horror escaped his lips. Perhaps something unforeseen had happened—an accident—illness—even death!

The clanging of bells broke upon his ears and he knew that the great ship was about to depart. Me-

chanically, disconsolately, he walked out and paced the broad, crowded wharf. All was excitement. There was the rush of people, the shouts, the cheers, the puffing of tugs, the churning of water, and the Kaiser Wilhelm was off on its long voyage. Half-heartedly, miserably, and in a dazed condition, he found a place in the front row along the rail. There were tears in his eyes, tears of anger, shame and mortification. She had played with him!

Moodily he watched the crowd of voyagers hanging over the rails of the moving leviathan of the deep. A faint smile of irony came to his lips. This was the boat on which his heart was to have been freighted from native shores. The craft was sailing, but it was not carrying the cargo that he had, in very good faith, consigned to Graustark. His heart was certainly not on board the Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse.

Gloomily his disappointed eyes swept along the rail of the big steamer, half interested in spite of themselves. Twice they passed a certain point on the forward deck, unconscious of a force that was attracting them in that direction. The third time he allowed them to settle for an instant on the group of faces and figures and then stray off to other parts of the ship. Some strange power drew them again to the forward deck, and this time he was startled into an intent stare. Could he believe those eyes? Surely that was her figure at the rail—there between

the two young women who were waving their handkerchiefs so frantically. His heart began to jump up and down, wildly, doubting, impatiently. Why could not that face be turned toward the wharf as the others were? There was the blue coat but not the blue cap. A jaunty sailor hat sat where the never-to-be-forgotten cap had perched. The change was slight, but it was sufficient to throw him into the most feverish state of uncertainty. An insane desire to shout a command to this strange young woman came over him.

The ship was slowly opening a gap between herself and the wharf, and he knew that in a few moments recognition would be impossible. Just as he was losing hope and was ready to groan with despair, the face beneath the sailor hat was turned squarely in his direction. A glaze obscured his eyes, a numbness attacked his brain. It was Miss Guggenslocker!

Why was her name omitted from the passenger list? That question was the first to whirl through his addled brain. He forgot the questionings, forgot everything a moment later, for, to his amazement and delight and discomfiture, he saw that she was peering intently at him. A pair of big glasses was leveled at him for a second and then lowered. He plainly saw the smile on her face, and the fluttering cambric in her hand. She had seen him, after all,—had caught him in a silly exhibition of weak-

ress. Her last impression of him, then, was to be one of which he could not feel proud. While his heart burned with shame, it could not have been suspected from the appearance of his face. His eyes were dancing, his mouth was wide open with joy, his lips were quivering with a suppressed shout, his cheeks were flushed and his whole aspect bespoke ecstacy. He waved his hat and then his handkerchief, obtaining from her vigorous and unrestrained signs of approbation. Her face was wreathed in smiles as she leaned far over the rail, the picture of animated pleasure.

Making sure that her uncle and aunt were not visible, he boldly placed his fingers to his lips and wafted a kiss out over the water!

"Now she'll crush me," he cried to himself, regretting the rash act and praying that she had not observed it.

Her handkerchief ceased fluttering in an instant, and, with sinking heart, he realized that she had observed. There was a moment of indecision on the part of the fair one going out to sea, and then the little finger tips of both hands went to her lips and his kiss came back to him!

The people near him were surprised to hear a wild yell from his lips and then to see him wave his hat so madly that there was some danger of it being knocked to pieces against the railing or upon the persons of those who stood too close to escape the

whirling consequences. So unexpected had been her reception of what he considered a calamitous indiscretion that he was to be pardoned for the ebullition of relief and joy that followed. Had she drawn a revolver and fired angrily at him he could not have been more astounded. But to actually throw a kiss to him—to meet his imprudence in the same spirit that had inspired it! Too much to believe! In the midst of his elation, however, there came a reminder that she did not expect to see him again, that she was playing with him, that it was a merry jest and not a heartache that filled her bosom at the parting.

While he was still waving his handkerchief, debating savagely and joyously the wisdom of the act, she became a part of the distant color scheme; the blue figure faded and blended into the general tone and could no longer be distinguished. She was gone, but she had tossed him a kiss from lips that he should always see. As he turned away from the water, he found himself wondering if there had been tears in her eyes, but the probability was so remote that he laughed foolishly and aloud. A couple of girls heard the laugh and giggled in sympathy, but he turned a scowling face upon them and disappeared in the throng.

Uppermost in his bewildered mind was the question: Why is she not in the passenger list? Acting on a sudden impulse, he again sought out the

clerk in charge and made a most thorough inspection. There was no Guggenslocker among the names. As a last resort, he asked:

"They could not have sailed under an assumed name, could they?"

"I can't say as to that. Where are they going?"

"Graustark."

But the young man shook his head slowly, Lorry's shaking in unconscious accord.

"Are you sure that you saw the young lady on board?"

"Well, rather!" exclaimed Lorry, emphatically.

"I was going to say there are a lot of Italian and German singers on the ship, and you might have been mistaken. But since you are so positive, it seems very strange that your friends are not on the list."

So Lorry went away discouraged and with a vague fear that she might have been a prima donna whose real name was Guggenslocker but whose stage name was something more euphonious. He instantly put away the thought and the fear. She was certainly not an opera singer—impossible! He drove back to his hotel, and made preparations for his return to Washington. Glancing casually over the register, he came to the name that had been haunting him—Guggenslocker. There were the names, "Caspar Guggenslocker and four, Grau-

stark. Without hesitation, he began to question the clerk.

"They sailed on the Kaiser Wilhelm to-day," said that worthy. "That's all I know about them. They came yesterday and left to-day."

Mr. Grenfall Lorry returned to Washington as in a dream—a fairy dream. The air of mystery that had grown from the first was now an impenetrable wall, the top of which his curiosity could not scale. Even his fancy, his imagination, served him not. There was but one point on which he was satisfied: he was in love. His own condition was no mystery.

Several weeks later he went to New York to question the Captain of the Wilhelm, hoping to clear away the clouds satisfactorily. To his amazement, the captain said there had been no Guggenslockers on board nor had there been persons answering the description, so far as he could tell.

Through the long hot summer he worked, and worried, and wondered. In the first, he did little that was satisfactory to himself or to his uncle; in the second, he did so much that he was advised by his physician to take a rest; in the last, he indulged himself so extensively that it had become unbearable. He must know all about her! But how?

The early months of autumn found him pale and tired and indifferent alike to work and play. He found no pleasure in the society that had known

him as a lion. Women bored him; men annoyed him; the play suffocated him; the tiresome club was ruining his temper; the whole world was going wrong. The doctor told him he was approaching nervous prostration; his mother's anxious eyes could no longer be denied, so he realized grimly that there was but one course left open to him. He suggested it to the doctor, to his mother and to his uncle, and they agreed with him. It involved Europe.

Having fully decided again to cross the sea, his spirits revived. He became more cheerful, took an interest in things that were going on, and, by the time the Kaiser Wilhelm sailed in September, was the picture of health and life.

He was off for Edelweiss—to the strange Miss Guggenslocker who had thrown him a kiss from the deck that sailing-day.

VI

GRAUSTARK

Two weeks later Grenfall Lorry was landed and enjoying the sensations, the delights of that wonderful world called by the name of Paris. The second day after his arrival he met a Harvard man of his time on the street. Harry Anguish had been a pseudo art student for two years. When at college he was a hail-fellow-well-met, a leader in athletics and in matters upon which faculties frown. He and Lorry were warm friends, although utterly unlike in temperament; to know either of these men was to like him; between the two one found all that was admirable and interesting in man. The faults and virtues of each were along such different lines that they balanced perfectly when lumped upon the scale of personal estimation. Their unexpected meeting in Paris was an exhilarating pleasure to both, and for the next week or so they were inseparable. Together they sipped absinthe at the cafés and strolled into the theatres, the opera, the dance halls and the homes of some of Anguish's friends, French and American.

Lorry did not speak to his friend of Graustark

until nearly two weeks after his arrival in the city. He had discussed with himself the advisability of revealing his plans to Anguish, fearing the latter's ridicule with all the cowardice of a man who knows that scoffing is, in a large measure, justifiable. Growing impatient to begin the search for the unheard-of country, its capital and at least one of its inhabitants, he was at last compelled to inform Anguish, to a certain extent, of his plans for the future. He began by telling him of his intention to take a run over toward Vienna, Buda-Pesth and some of the Eastern cities, expecting to be gone a couple of months. To his surprise and consternation, Anguish enthusiastically volunteered to take the trip with him, having the same project in view for nearly a year.

There was nothing left for Lorry but to make a clear breast of it, which he did shamefacedly, expecting the laughter and raillery of his light-hearted friend as payment for his confidence. Instead, however, Anguish, who possessed a lively and romantic nature, was charmed by the story and proclaimed it to be the most delightful adventure that had ever happened outside of a story-book.

"Tell me all about her," he urged, his eyes sparkling with boyish enthusiasm. And Lorry proceeded to give him a personal description of the mysterious beauty, introducing him, in the same manner, to the distinguished uncle and aunt, adding all those de-

tails which had confounded and upset him during his own investigations.

"This is rich!" exclaimed Anguish. "Beats any novel written, I declare. Begad, old man, I don't blame you for hunting down this wonderful bit of femininity. With a curiosity and an admiration that had been sharpened so keenly as yours, I'd go to the end of the world myself to have them satisfied."

"I may be able to satisfy but one—curiosity. And maybe not that. But who knows of Graustark?"

"Don't give up before you've tried. If these people live in such a place, why, it is to be found, of course. Any railroad guide-book can locate this land of mystery. There are so many infernal little kingdoms and principalities over here that it would take a lifetime to get 'em all straightened out in one's head. To-morrow morning we will go to one of the big railway stations and make inquiries. We'll locate Graustark and then we'll go over and pluck the flower that grows there. All you need, my boy, is a manager. I'll do the arranging, and your little act will be the plucking."

"Easier said than done."

"She threw a kiss to you, didn't she?"

"Certainly, but, confound it, that was because she never expected to see me again."

"Same reason why you threw a kiss to her, I suppose?"

"I know why; I wasn't accountable."

"Well, if she did it any more wittingly than you did, she is accountable, and I'd hunt her up and demand an explanation."

Lorry laughed at his apparent fervor, but was glad that he had confided in his energetic countryman. Two heads were better than one, and he was forced to admit to himself that he rather liked the idea of company in the undertaking. Not that he expected to encounter any particular difficulty, but that he saw a strange loneliness ahead. Therefore he welcomed his friend's avowed intention to accompany him to Edelweiss as a relief instead of an annoyance. Until late in the night they discussed the coming trip, Anguish finally startling him with a question, just as he was stretching himself preparatory to the walk to his hotel.

"What are you going to do with her after you find her, Gren, old man?"

Grenfall's brow puckered and he brought himself up with a jerk, puzzled uncertainty expressing itself in his posture as well as in his face.

"I'll think about that after I have found her," he replied.

"Think you'll marry her?" persisted the other.

"How do I know?" exclaimed the woman hunter, savagely.

"Oh, of course you don't know—how could you?" apologized Anguish. "Maybe she won't have

you—maybe she is married—all sorts of contingencies, you know. But, if you'll pardon my inquisitiveness, I'd like to ask why you are making this wild-goose chase half around the world? Just to have another look at her?"

"You asked me if I thought——" Here he stopped.

"I take it for granted, then, that you'd like to. Well, I'm glad I've got something definite on which to base operations. The one object of our endeavors, from now on, is to exchange Guggenslocker for Lorry—certainly no robbery. A charity, I should say. Good-night! See you in the morning."

The next morning the two friends took a cab to several railway stations and inquired about Graustark and Edelweiss.

"She was stringing you, old man," said Anguish, after they had turned away from the third station. He spoke commiseratingly, as he really felt sorry.

"No!" exclaimed Lorry. "She told me the truth. There is a Graustark, and she lives there. I'll stake my life on those eyes of hers."

"Are you sure she said it was in Europe?" asked Harry, looking up and down the street as if he would not have been surprised to see her in Paris. In his heart he believed that she and her precious relatives had deceived old Gren. Perhaps their home was in Paris, and nowhere else. But for

Lorry's positiveness he would have laughed heartily at the other's simple credulity, or branded him a dolt, the victim of some merry actress's whim. Still, he was forced to admit, he was not in a position to see matters as they appeared, and was charitable enough to bide his time and to humor the faith that was leading them from place to place in the effort to find a land that they knew nothing about. Lorry seemed so sure, so positive, that he was loath to see his dream dispelled, his ideal shattered. There was certainly no Graustark; neither had the Guggenslockers sailed on the Wilhelm, all apparent evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. Lorry had been in a delirium and had imagined he saw her on the ship. If there, why was not her name in the list? But that problem tortured the sanguine searcher himself.

At last, in despair, after a fruitless search of two days, Lorry was willing to submit. With the perverseness common to half-defeated fighters, Anguish at once protested, forgetting that he had sought to dissuade his friend the day before.

"We'll go to the library of Paris and take a look through the books and maps," he said. "Or, better still, let us go to the post-office. There! Why have we not thought of that? What there is of a Graustark they'll know in the postal service."

Together they visited the chief post-office, where, after being directed to various deputies and clerks,

they at length found the department in which the information was obtainable. Inside of five minutes they were in possession of facts that vindicated Miss Guggenslocker, lifted Lorry to the seventh heaven, and put Mr. Anguish into an agony of impatience. Graustark was a small principality away off to the east, and Edelweiss was a city of some seventy-five thousand inhabitants, according to the postal guide-book.

The Americans could learn no more there, so they went to Baedecker's office. Here they found a great map, and, after diligent and almost microscopic search, succeeded in discovering the principality of Graustark. Then they looked at each other in dismay.

"It's a devil of a distance to that little red blot on the map," mused Lorry, pulling his nose reflectively. "What an outlandish place for a girl like her to live in," he continued. "And that sweet-faced old lady and noble Uncle Caspar! Ye gods! one would think barbarians existed there and not such people as the Guggenslockers, refined, cultivated, smart, rich. I'm more interested than ever in the place."

"So am I! I'm willing and ready to make the trip, old man, if you are still of a mind. It's a lark, and, besides, she may not be the only pretty and gracious girl there. We've had hard work to find it on the map, let's not stop till we see Edelweiss on the earth itself."

They made hasty preparations for the journey. Anguish, romantic and full of adventure, advised the purchase of a pair of pistols and a knife apiece, maintaining that, as they were going into an unknown and mountainous region, they should be prepared for brigands and other elements of danger. Lorry pooh-poohed the suggestion of brigands, but indulged his mood by buying some ugly-looking revolvers and inviting the prospect of something really thrilling in the way of an adventure. With their traps they were soon whirling through France, bound for a certain great city, on the road to Edelweiss, one filled with excitement, eagerness and boyish zeal, the other harassed by the sombre fear that a grave disappointment was in store for him. Through the glamour and the picturesqueness of the adventure there always crept the unconquerable feeling that he was on a fool's errand, that he was committing a deed so weak and brainless that it was sure to make him a veritable laughing-stock when it became known. After all, who was Miss Guggenslocker—brewer, baker, gardener or sausage-maker?

Traveling, of course, was pleasant at this time of the year, and the two Americans saw much that interested them along the way. Their French, especially Anguish's, was of great value to them, for they found occasion to use it at all times and in all places. Both spoke German fairly well, and took every opportunity to brush up in that language,

Lorry remembering that the Guggenslockers used many expressions that showed a preference for the Teutonic. The blithe Anguish, confident and in high feather, was heart and soul in the odd expedition of love, and talked incessantly of their reception by the far-away hostess, their impressions and the final result. His camera and sketching materials were packed away with his traps. It was his avowed intention to immortalize the trip by means of plate, palate and brush.

At the end of two days they reached a certain large city,—the first change, and then seven hundred miles to another. The distance from this point to the capital of Graustark was two hundred miles or more, chiefly through the mountainous lands. Somewhat elated by the cheerful information there received, they resumed the journey to Edelweiss, the city of vale, slope and park—summer, fall and winter. Changing cars at the end of the second day out, they sat back in the dusty seats of their carriage and sighed with relief.

"Unless we jump the track, this train will land us in the city we are looking for," said Anguish, stretching out his legs comfortably. "I'll admit it has been a tiresome journey, and I'll be glad when we can step into a decent hotel, have a rub, and feel like white men once more. I am beginning to feel like those dirty Slavs and Huns we saw 'way back there."

"There's one thing certain," said Lorry, looking out of the window. "The people and the habitations are different and the whole world seems changed since we left that station. Look at those fellows on horseback over there."

"What did I tell you about brigands and robbers!" exclaimed Anguish. "If those fellows are not bandits I'll lose faith in every novel I ever read."

The train rolled slowly past three mounted men whose steeds stood like statues upon a little knoll to the right of the track, men and beasts engaged in silent contemplation of the cars. The men, picturesquely attired and looking fierce, carrying long rifles, certainly bore an aspect that suggested the brigand. When the guard entered the carriage Anguish asked in German for some information concerning the riders.

"Dey're frontier police-guards," responded the man in English, smiling at their astonishment. Both Americans arose and shook hands with him.

"By George, it's good to hear a man talk white man's language," cried Anguish.

"How do you come to be holding a job on this road? An Englishman?" demanded Lorry. He looked anything but English.

"I'm not an Englishman," said the guard, flushing slightly. "My name's Sitzky, and I'm an American, sir."

"An American!" exclaimed Lorry. Sitzky grew loquacious.

"Sure! I used to be a sailor on a United States man-o'-war. A couple of years ago I got into trouble down at Constantinople and had to get out of the service. After dat I drifted up dis way and went to railroadin'." He hadn't exactly the manner of a man-o'-warsman.

"How long have you been on this road?" asked Grenfall.

"'Bout a year, I should t'ink. Been on this branch only two months, dough."

"Are you pretty well acquainted in Edelweiss?"

"Oh, I run in dere every other day—in an' out ag'in. It's a fine place,—purtiest you ever saw in your life. The town runs right up the mountain to the tip-top where the monks are—clear up in d' clouds. Dey say it snows up dere almost all d' time."

Later on, from the loquacious guard, the two Americans learned quite a good bit about the country and city to which they were going. His knowledge was somewhat limited along certain lines, but quite clear as to others.

"Dis Graustark, 's fer as I know, is eeder a sort o' State or somet'ing belongin' to de Umpire, governed by its own rulers. Edelweiss is de capital, d' big guns of d' land lives dere. I've walked out and saw d' castle where d' Princess and d' royalty

hangs out. D' people speak a language of deir own, and I can't get next to a t'ing dey say. But once in a while you find some guy dat talks French or German. Dey've got a little standin' army of two, t'ree t'ousand men an' dey've got de hottest uniforms you ever did see—red an' black an' gold. I don't see why d' United States can't get up somethin' foxy fer her soldiers to wear. Had a war over here not long ago, I understand—somethin' like ten or fifteen years ago. Dere's another little country up north of Graustark, and dey got in a wrangle 'bout somethin', and dey tell me in Edelweiss dat for 'bout a year dey fought like Sam Patch."

"Which was victorious?" demanded Lorry, deeply interested.

"I'm not sure. To hear d' Edelweiss people talk you'd t'ink dey licked d' daylights out of d' other slobs, but somehow I got next to d' fact dat dem other fellows captured de city an' went after a slashin' big war indemnity. I don't know much 'bout it, an' maybe I'm clear off, but I t'ink d' Graustark army was t'rashed. Everyt'ing is prosperous now, dough, an' you'd never know dere'd been a war. It's d' most peaceable town I ever saw."

"Did you ever hear of the Guggenslockers?" asked the irrepressible Anguish, and Lorry felt like kicking him.

"In Edelweiss? Never did. Friends of yours?"

"Acquaintances," interposed Lorry, hastily, frowning at Anguish.

"You won't have any trouble findin' 'em if dere anybody at all," said Sitzky, easily. "D' hotel people ought to be able to tell you all 'bout 'em."

"By the way, what is the best hotel there?" asked Anguish.

"Dere's the Burnowentz, one block north of d' depot." The travelers looked at one another and smiled, Sitzky observing the action. "Oh," he said, pleasantly, "dere's a swell joint uptown called d' Regengetz. It's too steep fer me, but maybe you gents can stand it. If you'll hang around d' depot fer a little while after we get in I'll steer you up dere."

"We'll make it worth your while, Sitzky," said Lorry.

"Never mind dat, now. Americans ought to stick together, no matter where dey are. We'll have a drink an' 'at's all, just to show we're fellow-countrymen."

"We'll have several drinks, and we'll eat and drink to-night at the 'swell joint' you talk about," said Anguish.

"We may drink dere, but I'll not eat dere. Dey wouldn't let a railroad guard inside de feedin' pen. Why, nothin' but royal guys eat dere when dey're downtown shoppin' or exposin' demselves to public gaze."

True to his word, when they reached Edelweiss late that afternoon Sitzky, their friend of uncertain origin, hurriedly finished his work and joined the travelers in the station. Lorry and Anguish were deeply interested in all they saw, the strange people, the queer buildings, the odd costumes and the air of antiquity that prevailed. Once upon the narrow, clean street they saw that Edelweiss was truly a city of the mountain-side. They had expected something wonderful, but were not prepared for what they found. The city actually ran up into the clouds. There was something so grand, so improbable, so unusual in the spectacle confronting them that they stared like children, aghast and stupefied. Each had the startling impression that a great human-dotted mountain was falling over upon his head; it was impossible to subdue the sensation of dizziness that the toppling town inspired.

"I know how you feel," observed Sitzky, laughing. "I was just d' same at first. To-morrow you walk a little way up d' side of d' mountain an' you'll see how much of d' city dere is on level ground down here. Dem buildings up dere ain't more'n one-fiftieth part of d' town. Dey're mostly summer homes. It gets hot as blazes down here in d' valley in d' middle of d' summer and d' rich ones move up d' mountain."

"How in thunder do people get up to those houses?" demanded Anguish.

"Mules," answered Sitzky, specifically. "Say! See dat little old feller comin' on horseback—wid d' white uniform? Well, dat's de chief of police, an' d' fellers behind him are police guards. 'At's old Dangloss himself. He's a peach, dey say."

A short, grizzly faced man, attired in a white uniform with red trimmings, followed by three men similarly garbed, rode by, going in the direction of the passenger station. Dangloss, as Sitzky had called him, was quite small in stature, rather stout, gray-bearded and eagle-nosed. His face was keen and red, and not at all the kind to invite familiarity. As he passed them the railroad guard of American citizenship touched his cap and the two travelers bowed, whereupon the chief of police gave them a most profound salutation, fairly sweeping his saddleskirts with his white cap.

"Polite old codger," observed Anguish.

"His company manners. Just let him get you in d' sweat-box, if you t'ink he's polite."

"Ever been there?"

"Well," a little confusedly, "I pasted a Graustark baggage-smasher down in d' yards two weeks ago, an' dey had me up. I proved d' feller insulted a lady, an' old Dangloss let me off, sayin' I'd ought to have a medal. Dese guys are great on gallantry when ladies is concerned. It it hadn't been fer dat, I'd be in d' lock-up now. An' say, you ought to see d' lock-up! It's a tower, wid dungeons an' all dat

sort of t'ing. A man couldn't no more get out 'n' he could fly up to d' monastery. Dey're great on law an' order here, too. D' Princess has issued strictest kind of rules an' everybody has to live up to 'em like as if dey was real Gospel. I t'ought I'd put you next, gents, so's you wouldn't be doin' any-t'ing crooked here."

"Thanks," said Lorry, dryly. "We shall try to conduct ourselves discreetly in the city."

Probably a quarter mile farther down the narrow, level street they came to the bazaars, the gaudy stores, and then the hotel. It was truly a hostelry to inspire respect and admiration in the mind of such as Sitzky, for it was huge and well equipped with the modern appointments. As soon as the two Americans had been given their rooms, they sent for their luggage. Then they went out to the broad piazza, with its columns and marble balustrades, and looked for Sitzky, remembering their invitation to drink. The guard had refused to enter the hotel with them, urging them to allow him to remain on the piazza. He was not there when they returned, but they soon saw him. On the sidewalk he was arguing with a white-uniformed police guard, and they realized that he had been ejected from sacred precincts.

They promptly rescued him from the officer, who bowed and strode away as soon as they interceded.

"Dese fellers are slick enough to see you are

swells and I'm not," said Sitzky, not a bit annoyed by his encounter. "I'll bet my head 'at inside ten minutes old Dangloss will know who you are, where you come from an' what you're doin' here."

"I'll bet fifty heads he won't find out what we're doing here," grinned Anguish, looking at Lorry. "Well, let's hunt up the thirst department."

They found the little apartment in which drinks were served at tables, and before they said good-bye to Sitzky in front of the hotel, a half hour later, that worthy was in exceedingly good humor and very much flushed in the face. He said he would be back in two days, and if they needed him for any purpose whatever, they could reach him by a note at the railway station.

"Funny how you run across an American in every nook and corner of the world," mused Lorry, as they watched the stocky ex-man-o'-warsman stroll off towards his hotel.

"If we can run across the Guggenslockers as easily, we'll be in luck. When shall we begin the hunt? To-night?"

"We can make a few inquiries concerning them. They certainly are people of importance here."

"I don't see the name on any of the brewery signs around town," observed Anguish, consolingly. "There's evidently no Guggenslocker here."

They strolled through the streets near the hotel until after six o'clock, wondering at the quaint archi-

tecture, the pretty gardens and the pastoral atmosphere that enveloped the city. Everybody was busy, contented, quiet and happy. There was no bustle or strife, no rush, no beggars. At six they saw hundreds of workingmen on the streets, going to their homes; shops were closed and there came to their ears the distant boom of cannon, evidently fired from different points of the compass and from the highland as well as the lowland.

"The toy army is shooting off the good-night guns," speculated Anguish. "I suppose everybody goes to bed now."

"Or to dinner," substituted Lorry, and they returned to the Regengetz. The dining hall was spacious and beautiful, a mixture of the Oriental and the mediæval. It rapidly filled.

"Who the dickens can all these people be? They look well," Anguish whispered, as if he feared their nearest neighbors might understand his English.

"They are unquestionably of the class in which we must expect to find the Guggenslockers."

Before the meal was over the two strangers saw that they were attracting a great deal of attention from the other guests of the house. The women, as well as the men, were eyeing them and commenting quite freely, it was easy to see. These two handsome, smooth-faced young Americans were as men from another world, so utterly unlike their companions were they in personal appearance. They

were taller, broader and more powerfully built than the swarthy-faced men about them, and it was no wonder that the women allowed admiration to show in their eyes. Toward the end of the dinner several officers came in, and the Americans took particular pains to study them. They were cleanly-built fellows, about medium height, wiry and active. As a class, the men appeared to average five feet seven inches in height, some a little taller, some a little shorter. The two strangers were over six feet tall, broad-shouldered and athletic. They looked like giants among these Graustark men.

"They're not very big, but they look as if they'd be nasty in a scrap," observed Anguish, unconsciously throwing out his chest.

"Strong as wildcats, I'll wager. The women are perfect, though. Have you ever seen a smarter set of women, Harry?"

"Never, never! A paradise of pretty women. I believe I'll take out naturalization papers."

When the two strangers left the dining-room they were conscious that every eye in the place was upon them. They drew themselves to their full height and strode between the tables toward the door, feeling that as they were on exhibition they ought to appear to the best advantage. During the evening they heard frequent allusions to "The Americans," but could not understand what was said. The hotel men were more than obsequious; the mili-

tary men and citizens were exceedingly deferential; the women who strolled on the piazza or in the great garden back of the hotel were discreetly curious.

"We seem to be the whole show here, Gren," said Anguish, as they sat down at one of the tables in the garden.

"I guess Americans are rare."

"I've found one fellow who can speak German and French, and not one, except our guard, who can talk English. That clerk talks German fairly well. I never heard such a language as these other people use. Say, old man, we'd better make inquiry about our friends to-night. That clerk probably won't be on duty to-morrow."

"We'll ask him before we go to bed," agreed Lorry, and upon leaving the brilliantly lighted garden they sought the landlord and asked if he could tell them where Caspar Guggenslocker lived. He looked politely incredulous and thoughtful, and then, with profound regret, assured them he had never heard the name. He said he had lived in Edelweiss all his life, and knew everybody of consequence in the town.

"Surely there must be such people here," cried Lorry, almost appealingly. He felt disheartened and cheated. Anguish was biting his lips.

"Oh, possibly among the poorer classes. If I were you, sir, I should call on Captain Dangloss,

the Chief of Police. He knows every soul in Edelweiss. I am positive I have never heard the name. You will find the Captain at the Tower to-morrow morning."

The two Americans went to bed, one so dismayed by his disappointment that he could not sleep for hours.

VII

THE LADY IN THE CARRIAGE

They slept rather late in the morning, first because they were very much fatigued after their long journey, second for the reason that they had been unable to woo slumber until long past midnight. Anguish stretched himself lazily in bed when he heard Lorry's voice from the adjoining room.

"I suppose we are to consult the police in order to get a clue to your charmer," he yawned. "Nice friends you pick up on railway journeys. I'd be ashamed."

"Well, Harry, I'll confess I'm disgusted. This has been the most idiotic thing I've ever done, and if you say the word we'll get out of here on the first train—freight or passenger. The Guggenslockers—pigs——" Mr. Lorry was savage.

"Not a bit of it, my boy, not a bit of it. We'll make a house-to-house canvass if the police fail us. Cheer up, cheer up!"

"You go to thunder!"

"Hold on! Don't talk like that, or I'll go back on you in a minute. I'm here because I choose to be, and I've more heart in the chase at this minute than

you have. I've not lost hope. We'll find the Guggenslockers if we have to hire detectives to trace 'em from the United States to their very doorstep. We're going to see the police after breakfast."

After breakfast they did go to see the Baron Dangloss. After some inquiry they found the gloomy, foreboding prison, and Mr. Anguish boldly pounded on the huge gates. A little shutter flew open, and a man's face appeared. Evidently he asked what was wanted, but he might as well have demanded their lives, so far were they from understanding his query.

"Baron Dangloss?" asked Anguish, promptly. The man asked something else, but as the Americans shook their heads deprecatingly, he withdrew his face and presently swung open the gates. They entered and he closed the doors behind them, locking them in. Then he directed them across the court to an open door in the aged mass of gray stone. As they strode away from the guard Lorry created consternation by demanding:

"How are we to talk to the Chief if he doesn't understand us or we him? We should have brought an interpreter."

"I forgot about the confounded language. But if he's real he can talk Irish." Lorry told him he wasn't funny.

"Is this His Excellency, Baron Dangloss?" asked Anguish, stepping into a small room and stopping

suddenly in the presence of the short, fierce man they had seen the day before. The American spoke in French.

"It is, gentlemen. Of what service can I be to Messieurs Lorry and Anguish?" responded the grim little Chief, politely rising from beside his desk. The visitors looked at one another in surprise.

"If he knows our names on such short notice, he'll certainly know the Guggenslockers," said Anguish to his friend in English.

"Ah, you are looking for some one named Guggenslocker?" asked the Chief, smiling broadly and speaking excellent English. "You must not be surprised, gentlemen. I speak many languages. I heard last night that you were inquiring about one Caspar Guggenslocker, and I have racked my brain, searched my books, questioned my officers, and I am sorry to inform you that there is no such person in Edelweiss."

"I was so well assured of it, Baron Dangloss," Lorry said.

"The name is totally unknown to me, sir. May I ask why you are searching for him?"

"Certainly. I met Mr. Guggenslocker, his wife and his niece last spring in the United States. They invited me to come and see them if I ever happened to be in this part of the world. As my friend and I were near here I undertook to avail myself of their invitation."

"And they said they lived in Edelweiss, Graustark?"

"They did, and I'll humbly confess I did not know much of the principality of Graustark."

"That is certainly complimentary, but, then, we are a little out of the beaten path, so it is pardonable. I was at first under the impression that you were American detectives with extradition papers for criminals bearing the name you mention."

"Oh!" gasped Anguish. "We couldn't find ourselves if we should be separated, Captain."

The grizzly-bearded Captain laughed lightly with them, and then asked Lorry if he would object to giving him the full story of his acquaintanceship with the alleged Graustarkians. The bewildered and disheartened American promptly told all he knew about them, omitting certain tender details, of course. As he proceeded the Chief grew more and more interested, and, when at last Lorry came to the description of the strange trio, he gave a sudden start, exposed a queer little smile for a second or so, and then was as sphynxlike as before. The ever-vigilant Anguish observed the involuntary start and smile, quick as the Chief had been to recover himself, and felt a thrill of triumph. To his anger and impatience, however, the old officer calmly shook his head at the end of the narrative, and announced that he was as much in the dark as ever

"Well, we'll search awhile for ourselves," declared Anguish, stubbornly, not at all satisfied.

"You will be wasting your time," said the Chief, meaningly.

"We've plenty to waste," retorted the other.

After a few moments they departed, Baron Dangloss accompanying them to the gate and assuring them that he and his men always would be at their command. His nation admired the American people, he warmly declared.

"That old codger knows our people, and I'll bet a thousand on it," said Harry, angrily, when they had gone some little distance down the street. Then he told of the queer exposure Dangloss had unwittingly made. Lorry, more excited than he cared to show, agreed that there was something very suspicious about this new discovery.

They walked about the quaint town for an hour or two, examining the buildings, the people and the soldiery with deep interest. From the head of the main street,—Castle Avenue,—they could plainly see the royal palace, nearly a mile away. Its towers and turrets, gray and gaunt, ran up among the green tree-tops and were outlined plainly against the yellow hills. Countless houses studded the steep mountain slope, and many people were discerned walking and riding along the narrow, ledge-like streets which wound toward the summit, far up in the clouds. Clearly and distinctly could be seen the

grim monastery, perched at the very pinnacle of the mountain, several miles away. Up there it looked bleak and cold and uninviting, in great contrast to the loveliness and warmth of the valley. Down below the grass was moist and soft, trees were approaching the stage where yellow and red tints mingle with the rich green, flowers were blooming, the land was redolent of the sweet fragrance of autumn, the atmosphere warm, clear and invigorating. It was paradise surmounted by desolation, drear and deadening.

Wherever the tall, distinguished Americans walked they formed the center of observation, and were the cause of comment that bore unmistakable signs of admiration. They bowed pleasantly to many of those who passed them, and received in return gracious and profound recognition. Military men saluted courteously; the women stared modestly and prettily—perhaps covetously; the merchants and citizens in general bowed and smiled a welcome that could not have been heartier. The strangers remarked the absence of vehicles on the main streets. There were pack mules and horses, human carriers—both male and female—but during the entire morning they saw not more than six or eight carriages. Vehicles were used solely by the quality and as a means of transportation for their persons only. Everybody, with the few exceptions mentioned, walked or rode horseback. The two

friends were delighted with the place, and Anguish advocated a sojourn of several weeks, even though they did not find the Guggenslockers, his object being to secure photographs and sketches of the picturesque people and the strange scenery, and to idle away some hours upon the glittering boulevards. Grenfall, since he was in the project so deeply, was so nearly reconciled as to be exhilarated by the plan. They decided to visit the royal grounds in the afternoon, providing there was no prohibition, reserving a ride up the hill for the next day. A gendarme who spoke German fairly well told them that they could enter the palace park if they obtained a signed order from the chief steward, who might be found at any time in his home near the gates.

They were strolling leisurely toward the hotel, for the moment forgetting their quest in this strange, sunny land, when they espied a carriage, the most conspicuous of any they had seen. The white horses were gaily caparisoned, the driver and the footman beside him wore rich uniforms, the vehicle itself gleamed and glistened with gold and silver trimmings. A short distance behind rode two young soldiers, swords to their shoulders, scabbards clanking against their stirrups. Each was attired in the tight red trousers, shiny boots, close-fitting black coat with gilt trimmings, and the red cap which the Americans had noted before because

of its brilliancy. People along the street were bowing deeply to the occupants, two ladies.

"Harry! Look!" exclaimed Lorry, clutching his friend's arm like a vise. "There in the carriage—on this side!" His voice was hoarse and trembling.

"Miss Gug—Guggenslocker?" cried Anguish.

"Yes! Yes!" They had stopped and Lorry was grasping a garden wall with one hand.

"Then it's funny nobody knows the name here. She seems to be someone of consequence. Good heaven, I don't blame you! She's the most beautiful——"

By this time the carriage was almost opposite and within forty feet of where they stood. The ladies, Miss Guggenslocker's companion as young and almost as beautiful as herself, had not observed the agitated two, but Lorry's face was beaming, his hat was off, and he was ready to spring to the carriage side at a moment's warning. Then the young girl at the side of the woman whose beauty had drawn a man half around the world saw the tall strangers, and called her companion's attention to them. Once more Grenfall Lorry and Miss Guggenslocker were looking into each other's eyes.

The lady started violently, her eyes grew wide, her lips parted, and her body was bent forward eagerly, a little gloved hand grasping the side of the open carriage. Her "ideal American" was bowing

low, as was the tall fellow at his side. When he looked up again his eyes were glowing, his handsome face was flushed, and he saw her smile, blush furiously and incline her head gravely. The carriage had swept past, but she turned her head, and he detected an appealing glance in her eyes, a perplexed wrinkle across her brow, both of which were swept away an instant later by the most bewitching of smiles. Again her head was inclined, this time a trifle more energetically, and then the maddening face was turned from him. The equipage rolled onward, and there was no effort on her part to check its progress. The men were left standing alone and disappointed on the streets of Edelweiss, the object of their search slipping away as soon as she had been found. Her companion was amazed by the little scene, it was evident, judging by the eager look on her face as she turned with a question in her eyes.

"Turned down!" exclaimed the irrepressible Anguish, dolefully. "That's pretty shabby treatment, old man. But she's quite worth the journey."

"I'll not go back to America without her. Do you hear that, Harry Anguish?" He was excited and trembling. "But why didn't she stop?" he went on, dismally.

"Oh, you dear old fool!" said Anguish.

The two stood looking after the carriage until it turned into a side street, half way down the shady

stretch toward the castle. They saw her companion glance back, but could not tell whether she did or not. Lorry looked uneasily at Anguish, and the latter read his thought.

"You are wondering about the Guggenslocker name, eh? I'll tell you what I've worked out during the past two minutes. Her name is no more Guggenslocker than mine is. She and the uncle used that name as a blind. Mark my words, she's quality over here; that's all there is about it. Now, we must find out just who she really is. Here comes a smart-looking soldier chap. Let's ask him, providing we can make him understand."

A young soldier approached, leisurely twirling a cane, for he was without his side arms. Anguish accosted him in French and then in German. He understood the latter and was very polite.

"Who was the young lady in the carriage that just passed?" asked Lorry, eagerly.

The face of the soldier flushed and then grew pale with anger.

"Hold on! I beg pardon, but we are strangers and don't quite understand your ways. I can't see anything improper in asking such a question," said Anguish, attempting to detain him. The young man struck his hand from his arm and his eyes fairly blazed.

"You must learn our ways. We never pass comment on a lady. If you do so in your land, I am

sorry for your ladies. I refuse to be questioned by you. Stand aside, fellow!"

Anguish stood aside in astonishment, and they watched the wrathful gallant strut down the street, his back stiff as a board.

"Damned touchy!" growled Anguish.

"You remember what Sitzky said about their respect for the weaker sex. I guess we'd better keep off that track or we'll hatch up a duel or two. They seem to be fire-eaters. We must content ourselves with searching out her home and without assistance, too. I've cooled off a bit, Harry, and, now that I've seen her, I'm willing to go slowly and deliberately. Let's take our time and be perfectly cool. I am beginning to agree with your incog. proposition. It's all clearing up in my mind now. We'll go back to the hotel and get ready for the visit to the palace grounds."

"Don't you intend to hunt her up? 'Gad, I wouldn't miss a minute if I had a chance to be with a girl like that! And the other was no scarecrow. She is rather a beauty, too. Greatest town for pretty women I ever struck. Vienna is out of it entirely."

They strolled on to the hotel, discussing the encounter in all its exhilarating details. Scarcely had they seated themselves on the piazza, after partaking of a light luncheon, when a man came galloping up to the walk in front of the hotel. Throwing his

bridle rein to a guard, he hastened to the piazza. His attire was that of a groom, and something about him reminded them of the footman who sat beside the driver of the carriage they had seen a short time before. He came straight to where the Americans sat smoking, and, bowing low, held before them an envelope. The address was "Grenfall Lorry, Esq^re^," but the man was in doubt as to which was he.

Lorry grasped the envelope, tore it open, and drew forth a daintily written note. It read:

"My Dear Mr. Lorry:

"I was very much surprised to see you this morning—I may add that I was delighted. If you will accompany this messenger when he calls for you at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, he will conduct you to my home, where I shall truly be charmed to see you again. Will you bring your friend?

"SOPHIA GUGGENSLOCKER."

Lorry could have embraced the messenger. There was a suspicion of breathlessness in his voice when he tried to say calmly to Harry:

"An invitation for to-morrow."

"I knew it would come that way."

"Also wants you to come."

"Sha'n't I be in the way?"

"Not at all, my boy. I'll accept for you. After this fellow goes, I'll let you read the note. Wait until I write an answer."

Motioning for the man to remain, he hastened to his room, pulled out some stationery, and feverishly wrote:

"My Dear Miss Guggenslocker:

"I shall be delighted to accompany your messenger to-morrow, and my friend, Mr. Harry Anguish, will be with me. I have come half way across the continent to see you, and I shall be repaid if I am with you but for a moment. You will pardon me if I say that your name has caused me despair. No one seems to have heard it here, and I was beginning to lose hope. You may expect me at three, and I thank you for the pleasure you bestow.

"Yours sincerely,

"GRENFALL LORRY."

This note, part of which had been written with misgiving, he gave to the messenger, who rode away quickly.

"She didn't wait long to write to you, I notice. Is it possible she is suffering from the effects of those three days on the other side of the Atlantic? Come to think of it, she blushed when she saw you this morning," said Anguish. Lorry handed him her note, which he read, and then solemnly shook hands with its recipient. "Congratulations. I am a very far-sighted young man, having lived in Paris."

VIII

THE ABDUCTION OF A PRINCESS

That afternoon they went to the palace grounds and inquired for the chief steward. After a few moments they were shown to his office in a small dwelling house just inside the gates. The steward was a red-faced little man, pleasant and accommodating. He could speak German—in fact, he was a German by birth—and they had no difficulty in presenting their request. Mr. Fraasch—Jacob Fraasch—was at first dubious, but their frank, eager faces soon gained for them his consent to see that part of the great park open to the public Beyond certain lines they were not to trespass. Anguish asked how they could be expected to distinguish these lines, being unacquainted, and the steward grimly informed them that the members of the royal guard would establish the lines so plainly that it would be quite clear.

He then wrote for them a pass to the grounds of the royal palace of Graustark, affixing his seal. In giving this pass to them, he found occasion to say that the princess had instructed him to extend every courtesy possible to an American citizen. It was

then that Anguish asked if he might be permitted to use his camera. There was an instant and emphatic refusal, and they were told that the pass would be rescinded if they did not leave the camera outside the gates. Reluctantly, Anguish deposited his luckless box in the steward's office, and they passed into the broad avenue which led toward the palace.

A guard, who served also as a guide, stepped to their side before they had taken ten paces. Where he came from they never knew, so instantaneous was his appearance. He remained with them during the two hours spent in the wonderful park.

The palace stood in the northwestern part of the grounds, possibly a half mile from the base of the mountain. Its front faced the mountain side. The visitors were not permitted to go closer than a quarter of a mile from the structure, but attained a position from which it could be seen in all its massive, ancient splendor. Anguish, who had studied churches and old structures, painted the castles on the Rhine, and was something of a connoisseur in architecture, was of the opinion that it had been standing for more than five hundred years. It was a vast, mediæval mass of stone, covered with moss and ivy, with towers, turrets and battlements. There had been a moat in bygone days, but modern ideas had transformed the waterway into solid, level ground. This they learned afterwards. Broad avenues approached in several directions, the castle

standing at the far side of a wide circle or parade ground. The open space before the balconies was fully three hundred yards square, and was paved. From each side stretched the velvety green with its fountains, its trees, its arbors, its flowers, its grottos and its red-legged soldiers.

The park was probably a mile square, and was surrounded by a high wall, on the top of which were little guard-houses and several masked cannon. In all their travels the Americans had not seen a more delightful bit of artifice, and they wandered about with a serene content that would have appealed to anyone but their voiceless guide. He led them about the place, allowing them to form their own conclusions, draw their own inferences and make their own calculations. His only acts were to salute the guards who passed and to present arms when he had conducted his charges to the edge of forbidden territory. When they had completed their tour of inspection their guide rapidly led the way to the wall that encircled the grounds, reaching it at a point not far from the castle itself. Here was situated another large gate, through which they did not pass. Instead, they ascended some steps and came out upon the high wall. The top of this wall was several feet wide, and walking was comparatively safe. They soon understood the guide's design. The object was to walk along this wall until they reached the main gate. Why this peculiar

course was to be taken they could not imagine at first. Anguish's fertile brain came to the rescue. He saw a number of women in a distant part of the grounds, and, remembering their guide's haste in conducting them to the wall, rightly conjectured that it was against custom for visitors to meet and gaze upon members of the royal household. The men and women, none of whom could be plainly distinguished from the far-away wall, were undoubtedly a part of the castle's family, and were not to be subjected to the curious gaze of sight-seers. Perhaps Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Graustark, was among them.

They reached the main gate and descended, Anguish securing his camera, after which they thanked the steward and turned to fee the guide. But he had disappeared as if the ground had swallowed him.

"Well, it's a fair Versailles," observed Anguish, as they walked down the street, glancing back at the frowning wall.

"It all goes to make me wonder why in the name of heaven we have never heard of this land of Graustark," said Lorry, still thinking of the castle's grandeur.

"My boy, there are lots of things we don't know. We're too busy. Don't you remember that but one-half the world knows how the other half lives? I'll wager there are not twenty-five people in the United

States who know there is such a country as Graustark."

"I don't believe that a single soul over there has heard of the place," vouchsafed Lorry, very truthfully.

"I'll accept the amendment," said Anguish. Then he proceeded to take a snap-shot of the castle from the middle of the street. He also secured a number of views of the mountain side, of some odd little dwelling houses, and two or three interesting exposures of red-robed children. Everybody, from the children up, wore loose robes, some red, some black, some blue, but all in solid colors. Beneath these robes were baggy trousers and blouses among the men, short skirts among the women. All wore low boots and a sort of turban. These costumes, of course, were confined to the native civilians. At the hotel the garb of the aristocrats was vastly different. The women were gowned after the latest Viennese patterns, and the men, except those of the army, wore clothes almost as smart as those which covered the Americans. Miss Guggenslocker—or whatever her name might be—and her carriage companion were as exquisitely gowned as any women to be seen on the boulevards or in Hyde Park of an afternoon.

It was late in the afternoon when they returned to the hotel. After dinner, during which they were again objects of interest, they strolled off towards

the castle, smoking their cigars and enjoying the glorious air. Being a stranger in a strange land, Lorry acted on the romantic painter's advice and also stuck a revolver in his pocket. He laughed at the suggestion that there might be use for the weapon in such a quiet, model, well-regulated town, but Anguish insisted:

"I've seen a lot of these fellows around town who look like genuine brigands and cut-throats, and I think it just as well that we be prepared," asserted he, positively, and his friend gratified what he called a whim.

At ten o'clock the slender moon dropped behind the mountain, and the valley, which had been touched with its tender light, gradually took on the sombreness and stillness of a star-lit night. The town slumbered at eleven, and there were few lights to be seen in the streets or in the houses. Here and there strolled the white-uniformed police guards; occasionally soldiers hurried barracks-ward; now and then belated citizens moved through the dense shadows on the sidewalks, but the Americans saw still life in its reality. Returning from their stroll beside the castle-walls, far to the west of where they had entered the grounds that afternoon, they paused in the middle of Castle Avenue, near the main gate, and looked down the dark, deserted street. Far away could be seen the faint glare from their hotel; one or two street-lamps burned in the

business part of the city; aside from these evidences of life there was nothing but darkness, silence, peacefulness about them everywhere.

"Think of Paris or New York at eleven o'clock," said Lorry, a trifle awed by the solitude of the sleeping city.

"It's as dead as a piece of prairie-land," said his friend. "'Gad, it makes me sleepy to look down that street. It's a mile to the hotel, too, Lorry. We'd better move along."

"Let's lie down near the hedge, smoke another cigar and wait till midnight. It is too glorious a night to be lost in sleep," urged Lorry, whose heart was light over the joys of the day to come. "I can dream just as well here, looking at the dark old castle with its one little tower-light, as I could if I tried to sleep in a hard bed down at the hotel."

Anguish, who was more or less of a dreamer himself, consented, and, after lighting fresh cigars, they threw themselves on the soft, dry grass near the tall hedge that fenced the avenue as it neared the castle grounds. For half an hour they talked by fits and starts; long silences were common, broken only by brief phrases which seemed so to disturb the one to whom they were addressed that he answered gruffly and not at all politely. Their cigars, burnt to mere stubs, were thrown away, and still the waking dreamers stretched themselves in the almost impenetrable shade of the hedge, one thinking of the face

he had seen, the other picturing in his artist eye the painting he had vowed to create from the moon-lit castle of an hour ago.

"Some one coming," murmured the painter, half rising to his elbow attentively.

"Soldiers," said the other briefly. "They'll not disturb us."

"They'll not even see us, I should say. It's as dark as Egypt under this hedge. They'll pass if we keep quiet."

The figures of two men could be seen approaching from the city, dim and ghostly in the semi-blackness of the night. Like two thieves, the Americans waited for them to pass. To their exceeding discomfiture, however, the pedestrians halted directly in front of their resting place and seated themselves leisurely upon a broad, flat stone at the roadside. It was too dark to see if they were soldiers, notwithstanding the fact that they were less than fifteen feet away.

"He should be here at twelve," said one of the newcomers in a low voice and in fairly good English. The other merely grunted. There was a silence of some duration, broken by the first speaker.

"If this job fails and you are caught it will mean years of servitude."

"But in that case we are to have ten thousand gavvos apiece for each year we lie in prison. It's fair pay—not only for our failure, but for our

silence," said the other, whose English was more difficult to understand.

Anguish's fingers gripped Lorry's leg, but there was no sound from either of the thoroughly aroused dreamers. "A plot, as I live," thought each, with a thrill.

"We must be careful to speak only in English. There are not twenty people in Edelweiss who understand it, but the night has ears. It is the only safe tongue. Geddos speaks it well. He should be here." It was the first speaker who uttered these words, little knowing that he had listeners other than the man to whom he spoke.

A dark figure shot across the roadway, and, almost before the Americans were aware of it, the party numbered three.

"Ah, Geddos, you are punctual."

"I have found it ever a virtue," responded the newcomer.

"Have you secured your men?"

"I have your——"

"Sh! Call me Michael, on your life! They are ready and willing to undertake the venture?"

"Yes, but they do not understand the true conditions. I have told them that we are to rob the castle and carry the booty to Ganlook before morning."

"They do not know the real object of the raid,

then. That is as I desired. Are they trusty and experienced men?"

"The best—or the worst—that I could find in Vienna. Not one understands our language, and they are so ignorant of our town that they are entirely dependent on me. They know nothing whatever of the Princess, Michael, and will do only as they are told, realizing that if caught they will be guillotined. I have told them it is the royal palace we are to rifle. Ostrom, here, and I, are the only ones, except yourself and the men who will aid us inside the castle, who know the truth, sir."

"It cannot fail, unless those inside prove false or unworthy," said the hoarse-voiced Ostrom. Anguish's fingers were gripping Lorry's leg so fiercely that the blood was ready to burst out, but he did not feel the pain. Here, then, was some gigantic plot in which the person of the Princess herself was to be considered. Was it an assassination?

"You have five of these Viennese?"

"Yes. Two to stand beneath the window to receive the booty as we lower it to the ground, one to stand guard at the west gate and two to attend the carriage and horses in the ravine beyond the castle."

"When did these men arrive?"

"This morning. I kept them in my sister's home until an hour ago. They are now in the ravine, awaiting Ostrom and myself. Are you sure

Michael, that the guards and the cook have been made to understand every detail? The faintest slip will mean ruin."

"They are to be trusted fully. Their pay is to be high enough to make it an object to be infallible. The guard, Dushan, will leave the gate unwatched, and you will chloroform him—with his consent, of course. You will enter, as I have explained before, crawl along the dark shadow of the wall until you reach the arbor that leads to the kitchen and scullery. Here another guard, Rabbo—known to Ostrom as a comrade in Her Royal Highness's service not more than a year ago—will be encountered. He will be bound and gagged without the least noise or struggle. Just as the clock strikes two the cook will walk past the scullery window, in the basement, thrice, carrying a lighted candle. You will see this light through the window, and will know that all is well inside the castle. Ostrom, you will then lead the two Viennese to a place directly beneath the third window in the Princess's sleeping apartment. There are several clumps of shrubbery there, and under these they will hide, protected from the gaze of any watchman who is not with us. You and Geddos will be admitted to the scullery by the cook, who will conduct you to the hall leading to Her Highness's bedroom. The man who guards her door is called Dannox. He will not be at his post but will accompany you when you leave the castle.

You will understand how carefully you must enter her room and how deeply she must be chloroformed. In the adjoining room her lady-in-waiting, the Countess Dagmar, sleeps. If her door is ajar, you are to creep in and chloroform her, leaving her undisturbed. Then the Princess is to be wrapped in the cloth you take with you and lowered from the window to the men below. They are to remain in hiding until you have left the castle and have reached their side. It will not be difficult, if caution is observed, for you to get outside of the wall and to the carriage in the ravine. I have given you this plan of action before, I know, but I desire to impress it firmly upon your minds. There must not be the slightest deviation. The precision of clockwork is necessary."

The man named Michael hissed the foregoing into the ears of his companions, the palsied Americans hearing every word distinctly. They scarcely breathed, so tremendous was the restraint imposed upon their nerves. A crime so huge, so daring, as the abduction of a Princess, the actual invasion of a castle to commit the theft of a human being just as an ordinary burglar would steal in and make way with the contents of a silver chest, was beyond their power of comprehension.

"We understand fully how it is to be done, and we shall get her to Ganlook on time," said Geddos, confidently.

"Not a hair of her head must be harmed," cautioned the arch-conspirator. "In four days I shall meet you at Ganlook. You will keep her in close confinement until you hear from me. Have you the guards' uniforms that you are to wear tonight?"

"They are with the carriage in the ravine; Ostrom and I will don them before going to the castle In case we are seen, they will throw observers off the track long enough for us to secure a good start in our flight."

"Remember, there is to be no failure. This may mean death to you; certainly a long prison term if you are apprehended. I know it is a daring deed, but it is just the kind that succeeds. Who would dream that mortal man could find the courage to steal a Princess of the realm from her bed and spirit her away from under the very noses of her vaunted guardsmen? It is the bold, the impossible plan that wins."

"We cannot fail if your men on the inside do their work well," said Geddos, repeating what Ostrom had said. "All depends on their faithfulness."

"They will not be found wanting. Your cutthroats must be sent on to Caias with the empty carriage after you have reached Ganlook in safety. You will need them no more. Ostrom will pay them, and they are to leave the country as quickly

as possible. At Caias they will be able to join a pack-train that will carry them to the Great Northern Railroad. From there they will have no trouble in reaching Vienna. You will explain to them, Geddos. All we need them for, as you know, is to prove by their mere presence in case of capture that the attempt was no more than a case of burglary conceived by a band of Viennese robbers. There will be no danger of capture if you once get her outside the walls. You can be half way to Ganlook before she is missed from the castle. Nor can she be found at Ganlook if you follow the instructions I gave last night. It is now nearly one o'clock, and in half an hour the night will be as dark as Erebus. Go, men; you have no more time to lose, for this must be accomplished slowly, carefully, deliberately. There must be no haste until you are ready for the race to Ganlook. Go, but for God's sake, do not harm her! *And do not fail!*"

"Failure means more to us than to you, Michael," half whispered the hoarse Ostrom.

"Failure means everything to me! I must have her!"

Already the two hirelings were moving off toward the road that ran west of the castle grounds. Michael watched them for a moment and then started swiftly in the direction of the city. The watchers had not been able to distinguish the faces of the conspirators, but they could never forget the

calm, cold voice of Michael, with its quaint, jerky English.

"What shall we do?" whispered Anguish, when the men were out of hearing.

"God knows!" answered Lorry. "This is the most damnable thing I ever heard of. Are we dreaming? Did we really see and hear those men?" He had risen to his feet, his companion sitting weakly before him.

"There's no question about it! It's a case of abduction, and we have it in our power to spoil the whole job. By Gad, but this is luck, Gren!" Anguish was quivering with excitement as he rose to his feet. "Shall we notify old Dangloss or alarm the steward? There's no time to be lost if we want to trap these fellows. The chief devil is bound to escape, for we can't get him and the others, too, and they won't peach on him. Come, we must be lively! What are you standing there for? Damn it, the trap must be set!"

"Wait! Why not do the whole job ourselves?"

"How—what do you mean?"

"Why should we alarm anybody? We know the plans as well as these scoundrels themselves. Why not follow them right into the castle, capture them red-handed, and then do the alarming? I'm in for saving the Princess of Graustark with our own hands and right under the noses of her vaunted guardsmen, as Michael says." Lorry was thrilled

by the spirit of adventure. His hand gripped his friend's arm and his face was close to his ear. "It is the grandest opportunity two human beings ever had to distinguish themselves!"

"Great heaven, man! We can't do such a thing!" gasped Anguish.

"It's the easiest thing in the world. Besides, if we fail, we have nothing to lose. If we succeed, see what we've done! Don't hesitate, old man! Come on! Come on! We'll take 'em ourselves, as sure as fate. Have you no nerve? What kind of an American are you? This chance won't come in ten lifetimes! Good God, man, are we not equal to those two scoundrels?"

"Two? There are at least ten of them!"

"You fool! The three guards are disposed of in advance, two of the Viennese are left with the horses, two are chucked off under the Princess's window, and one stands at the gate. We can slug the man at the gate, the fellows under the window are harmless, and that leaves but our two friends and the cook. We have every advantage in the world. Can't you see?"

"You are right! Come on! I'll risk it with you. We will save the Princess of Graustark!"

"Don't you see it will be just as easy for us to enter the castle as for these robbers? The way will be clear, and will be kept clear. Jove, man, we need

not be more than thirty seconds behind them. Is your pistol all right?"

By this time the two men were speeding along the grassy stretch toward the road that ran beside the wall. They looked at their pistols, and placed them carefully in outside coat pockets.

"We must throw away these heavy canes," whispered the painter to his friend, who was a pace or so ahead.

"Keep it! We'll need one of them to crack that fellow's head at the gate. 'Gad, it's dark along here!"

"How the devil are we to know where to go?"

"We'll stop when we come to the gate where we climbed up the wall to-day. That is the only entrance I saw along the west wall, and it is near the castle. Just as soon as the gang enters that gate we'll crawl up and get rid of the fellow who stands watch."

It was so dark that they could barely see the roadway, and they found it necessary to cease talking as they slunk along beside the wall. Occasionally they paused to listen, fearing that they might draw too close upon the men who had gone before. At last they came to a big gate and halted.

"Is this the gate?" whispered Anguish.

"Sh! Yes, I'm quite sure. We are undoubtedly near the castle, judging by the distance we have

come. Let us cross the road and lie directly opposite. Be careful!"

Like panthers, they stole across the road and down a short, grassy embankment. At Anguish's suggestion, Lorry wrapped his handkerchief tightly about the heavy end of his cane, preparing in that way to deaden the sound of the blow that was to fall upon the Vienna man's head. Then they threw aside their hats, buttoned their coats tightly, and sank down to wait, with bounding hearts and tingling nerves, the arrival of the abductors, mutely praying that they were at the right gate.

IX

THE EXPLOIT OF LORRY AND ANGUISH

During the half hour spent in the grassy ditch or gutter, they spoke not more than half a dozen times, and in the faintest of whispers. They could hear the guard pacing the driveway inside the ponderous gate, but aside from his footsteps no sound was distinguishable. A sense of oppression came over the two watchers as the minutes grew longer and more deathlike in their stillness. Each found himself wondering why the leaves did not stir in the trees, why there were no nightbirds, no crickets, no croaking frogs, no sign of life save that steady, clocklike tread inside the wall. So dark was it that the wall itself was but a deeper shadow against the almost opaque blackness beyond. No night, it seemed to them, had ever been so dark, so still. After the oppression came the strange feeling of dread, the result of an enforced contemplation of the affair in which they were to take a hand, ignorant of everything except the general plan.

They knew nothing of the surroundings. If they failed, there was the danger of being shot by the guards before an explanation could be made. If they

succeeded, it must be through sheer good fortune and not through prowess of mind or muscle. Once inside the castle, how could they hope to follow the abductors at a safe distance and still avoid the danger of being lost or running into trusty guards? The longer they lay there the more hazardous became the part they had so recklessly ventured to play. In the heart of each there surged a growing desire to abandon the plan, yet neither could bring himself to the point of proposing the retreat from the inspired undertaking. Both knew the sensible, judicious act would be to alarm the guards and thus avoid all possible chance of a fiasco. With misgivings and doubts in their hearts the two self-appointed guardians of the Princess lay there upon the grass, afraid to give up the project, yet fearing the outcome.

"The dickens will be to pay, Lorry, if they dispose of this guard *on the inside* and lock the gate. Then how are we to follow?" whispered Anguish.

Lorry was thoughtful for a while. He felt the chill of discouragement in his heart.

"In that case we must lie outside and wait till they come out with the Princess. Then make a sudden assault and rescue her. In the darkness we can make them think there are a dozen rescuers," he whispered at length. After a while Anguish asked another appalling question, the outgrowth of brain-racking study:

"Suppose these fellows who will be in guards' uniform, should turn about and capture us. What then? We are strangers, and our story would not be believed. They could slip away in the excitement and leave us in a very awkward position."

"Harry, if we are going to hatch up all sorts of possibilities, let's give up the thing right now. I have thought of a thousand contingencies, and I realize how desperate the job is to be. We must either cast discretion to the winds or we must retreat. Which shall we do?"

"Cast aside discretion and hang our fears," said the other, once more inspired. "We'll take chances and hope for the best. If we see we are going to fail we can then call for the guards. The grounds are doubtless full of soldiers. The only part I'm worried about is the groping through that strange, dark castle."

"We must do some calculating and we must stick close together. By watching where they station the two Viennese we can figure about what direction we must take to get to the princess's room. Sh! Isn't that some one approaching?"

They strained their ears for a moment and then involuntarily, spasmodically shook hands, each heaving the deep breath of excitement. The stealthy rustle of moving bodies was heard, faint, but positive. It was a moment of suspense that would have strained the nerve of a stone image. Where were

the abductors? On which side of the road and from what direction did they come? Oh, for the eyes of a cat?

There was a slight shuffling of feet near the gate, a suppressed "Sh!" and then deathly silence. The gate opened, a faint creaking attesting the fact, followed by the heavy breathing of men, the noise of subdued activity, the scent of chloroform. Some whispering, and then the creaking of the gate.

"They've gone," whispered Anguish. Lorry's form arose to a crouching posture and a moment later he was crossing the road with the tread of a cat, his cane gripped firmly in his hand. Anguish followed with drawn revolver. So still was their approach that they were upon the figure of a man before they were aware of the fact. In the darkness the foremost American saw the outline of a human figure bending over a long object on the ground. He could smell chloroform strongly, and grasped the situation. The Viennese was administering the drug, his companions having left that duty for him to perform. No doubt the treacherous guardsman was lying calmly on his back, bound and gagged, welcoming unconsciousness with a smile of security.

As soon as Lorry gained his bearings fully he prepared to fell the wretch who was to stand watch. Anguish heard his friend's figure suddenly shoot to an erect position. A whirring sound as of disturbed air and then a dull thud. Something rolled over on

the ground, and all was still. He was at Lorry's side in an instant.

"I hope I haven't killed him," whispered Lorry. "Quick! Here is his bottle of ether. Hold it beneath his nose. I am going to pile the body of this guard crosswise on top of him. He will not be able to arise if he should recover consciousness."

All this was done in a moment's time, and the two trackers were headed for the entrance. The gate was ajar two or three feet. With turbulent hearts, they stole through.

"Keep along the wall," whispered Lorry, "and trust to luck. The castle is to the left."

Without hesitation they crept over the noiseless grass, close beside the wall. Directly they heard sounds near at hand. The abductors were binding and chloroforming the guard at the arbor. After waiting for some moments they heard the party glide away in the darkness, and followed. The body of the guard was lying just outside the mouth of the arbor, and the odor of chloroform was almost overpowering. Once inside the long arbor, the Americans moved slowly and with greater caution. There was a dim light in a basement window ahead. Toward the front of the castle and in the second story a faint glow came from another window. They guessed it to be from the Princess's room or from that of the Countess.

At last they saw four figures steal past the dim

basement light. One of them halted near the window, and three crept away in the darkness. Presently one of them returned, and all activity was at an end for the time being. How near it was to two o'clock the watchers could not tell. They only knew that they were within twenty-five feet of Geddos and Ostrom, and that they would not have long to wait.

Soon a bright little blaze of light crossed the basement opening. Then it returned, crossing a second time, and a third. All was still again. The soft shuffle of a foot, the rustle of arbor vines, and the form of a man crawled up to the window. With inconceivable stealth and carefulness it glided through the aperture, followed by a companion.

Lorry and Anguish were at the opening a second or two later, lying flat on their stomachs and listening for sounds from within. The dim light was still there, the window was open, and there was a sound of whispering. Lorry raised his head and peered through, taking calculations while the light made it possible. He saw an open door on the opposite side of the low room, with steps beyond, leading upward. Between the window and the door there were no obstacles. Up those steps he saw three men creep, the leader carrying the dim light. The door was left open, doubtless to afford unimpeded exit from the building in case of emergency. Harry Anguish touched Lorry's arm.

"I took the two pistols from that Vienna man out there. We may need them. Here is one for yourself. Go first, Lorry," he whispered.

Lorry stuck the revolver in his coat pocket and gently slid through the window to the floor below His friend followed, and they paused to listen. Taking Anguish by the hand, the other led the way straight to the spot where he remembered seeing the door.

Boldly the two men began the breathless ascent of the stone steps. The top was reached, and far ahead, down a narrow hall, they saw the three men and the dim light moving. Two of them wore uniforms of guards. Keeping close to the wall, their followers crept after them. Up another flight of steps they went, and then through a spacious hall. The Americans had no time and no desire to inspect their surroundings. The wide doors at the far side of the room opened softly, and here the trio paused. Down a great marble hallway a dim red light shed its soft glow. It came from the lamp at the foot of the broad staircase.

The cook pointed to the steps, and then gave his thumb a jerk toward the left. Without the least sign of fear, Geddos and Ostrom glided into the hall and made for the staircase. The watchers could not but feel a thrill of admiration for these daring wretches. But now a new danger confronted them. The cook remained standing in the doorway, watch-

ing his fellows in crime! How were they to pass him?

There was no time to be lost. The abductors were creeping up the steps already, and the cook must be disposed of. He had blown out the light which he carried, and was now a very dim shadow. Lorry glided forward and in an instant stood before the amazed fellow, jamming a pistol into his face.

"A sound and you die!" he hissed.

"Don't move!" came another whisper, and a second revolver touched his ear. The cook, perhaps, did not know their language, but he certainly understood its meaning. He trembled, and would have fallen to the floor had not the strong hand of Lorry pinned him to the wall. The hand was on his throat, too.

"Chloroform him, Harry, and don't let him make a sound!" whispered the owner of the hand. Anguish's twitching fingers succeeded those of his friend on the cook's throat, his pistol was returned to his pocket, and the little bottle came again into use.

"I'll go ahead. Follow me as soon as you have finished this fellow. Be careful, and turn to the left when you come to the top."

Lorry was off across the marble floor, headed for the stairway, and Anguish was left in charge of the cook, of whom he was to make short work. Now came the desperate, uncertain part of the transac-

tion. Suppose he were to meet the two conspirators at the head of the stairs, or in the hall, or that the other traitor, Dannox, should appear to frustrate all. It was the most trying moment in the whole life of the reckless Lorry.

When near the top of the steps he hugged the light balustrade and cautiously peered ahead. He found himself looking down a long hall, at the far end of which, to his right, a dim light was burning. There was no sound and there was no sign of the two men, either to the right or to the left. His heart felt like lead! They evidently had entered the Princess's room! How was he to find that room? Slowly he wriggled across the broad, dark hall, straightening up in the shadow of a great post. From this point he edged along the wall for a distance of ten or twelve feet to the left. A sound came from farther down the hall, and he imagined he heard some one approaching.

His hand came in contact with a heavy hanging or tapestry, and he quickly squirmed behind its folds, finding himself against a door which moved as his body touched it. He felt it swing open slightly and drew back, intending to return to the hall, uncertain and very much undecided as to the course to pursue. His revolver was in his hand. Just as he was about to pull aside the curtain a man glided past, quickly followed by another. Providence had kept him from running squarely into them. They

were going toward the left, and he realized that they were now approaching the Princess's room. How he came to be ahead of them he could not imagine. Strange trembling seized his legs, so great was the relief after the narrow escape. Again he felt the door move slightly as he pressed against it. The necessity for a partial recovery of his composure before the next and most important step impelled him softly to enter the room for an instant's breath.

Holding to the door, he stood inside and drew himself to his full height, taking a long and tremulous breath. There was no light in the room, but through the door crack to his left came a dim, broad streak. He now knew where he was. This room was next to that in which the Princess slept, for had he not seen the light from her window? Perhaps he was now in the room of the Countess Dagmar. Next door! Next door! Even now the daring Geddos and Ostrom were crawling towards the bed of the ruler of Graustark, not twenty feet away. His first impulse was to cross and open the door leading to the next room, surmising that it would be unlocked, but he remembered Anguish, who was doubtless, by this time, stealing up the stairs. They must not be separated, for it would require two steady, cool heads to deal with the villains. It was not one man's work. As he turned to leave the room, he thought how wonderfully well they had succeeded in the delicate enterprise so far.

His knees struck the door, and there was a dull thump, not loud in reality, but like the report of a gun to him. A sudden rustle in the darkness of the room and then a sleepy voice, soft and quick, as of a woman awakening with a start.

"Who is it?"

His heart ceased beating, his body grew stiff and immovable. Again the voice, a touch of alarm in it now:

"Is that you, Dannox?"

She spoke in German, and the voice came from somewhere in front and to his right. He could not answer, could not move. The paralysis of indecision was upon him.

"How is it that the outer door is open?"

This time there was something like a reprimand in the tones, still low. He almost could see the wide-open, searching eyes.

X

YETIVE

There could be no further hesitation. Something must be done, and instantly. He gently closed the door before answering the third question. In his nervousness he spoke in English, advancing to the middle of the room. Impossible to see the woman to whom he hissed this alarming threat—he only could speculate as to its effect:

"If you utter a sound, madam, I shall kill you. Be calm, and allow me to explain my presence here!"

He expected her to shriek, forgetting that she might not understand his words. Instead there was a deathly silence. Had she swooned? His heart was leaping with hope. But she spoke softly again, tremulously, and in English:

"You will find my jewels on the dressing-table. Take them and go. You will not hurt me?"

"I am not here to do you injury, but to serve your Princess," whispered the man. "For God's sake, do not make an outcry. You will ruin everything. Will you let me explain?"

"Go! Go! Take anything! I can be calm no longer. Oh, how can I expect mercy at your hands!" Her tones were rising to a wail of terror.

"Sh! Do you want to die?" he hissed, striding to the canopy bed, discernible as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. "I will kill you if you utter a sound, so help me God!"

"Oh!" she moaned.

"Listen! You must aid me! Do you hear?"

Another heart-breaking moan. "I am here to save the Princess. There is a plot to abduct her tonight. Already there are men in the castle, perhaps in her room. You must tell me where she sleeps. There is no time to be lost. I am no thief, before God! I am telling you the truth. Do not be alarmed, I implore you. Trust me, madam, and you will not regret it. Where does the Princess sleep?" He jerked out these eager, pleading words quickly, breathlessly.

"How am I to trust you?" came back a whisper from the bed.

"Here is a revolver! Take it and kill me if I attempt the slightest injury. Where are you?" He felt along the bed with his hand.

"Keep away! Please! Please!" she sobbed.

"Take the pistol! Be calm, and in heaven's name help me to save her. Those wretches may have killed her already!"

The revolver dropped upon the clothes. He was bending eagerly over, holding the curtains back.

"My friend is in the hall. We have traced the

men to the Princess's door, I think. My God, be quick! Do you wish to see her stolen from under your eyes?"

"You are now in the Princess's room," answered the voice from the bed, calmer and with some alacrity. "Is this true that you tell me?"

"As God is my witness! And you—you—are the Princess?" gasped the man, drawing back.

"I am. Where is Dannox?" She was sitting bolt upright in the bed, the pistol in her trembling fingers.

"He is one of the conspirators. One of the cooks and two other guards are in the plot. Can you trust me enough to leave your bed and hide in another part of the room? The scoundrels have mistaken the door, but they may be here at any moment. You must be quick! I will protect you—I swear it! Come, your Highness! Hide!"

"Something in the fierce anxious whisper gave her confidence. The miracle had been wrought! He had composed this woman under the most trying circumstances that could have been imagined. She slipped from the bed and threw a long, loose silken gown about her.

"Who are you?" she asked, touching his arm.

"I am a foreigner—an American—Grenfall Lorry! Hurry!" he implored.

She did not move for a moment, but he distinctly heard her catch her breath.

"Am I dreaming?" she murmured, faintly. Her fingers now clutched his arm tightly.

"I should say not! I don't like to order you around, your Highness, but——".

"Come—come to the light!" she interrupted, excitedly. "Over here!"

Noiselessly she drew him across the room until the light fell across his face. It was not a bright light, but what she saw satisfied her. He could not see her face, for she stood outside the strip of dusky yellow.

"Two men lie beneath your window, and two are coming to this room. Where shall I go? Come, be quick, madam! Do you want to be carted off to Ganlook? Then don't stand there like a—like a—pardon me, I won't say it!"

"I trust you fully. Shall I alarm the guard?" she whispered, recovering her self-possession.

"By no means! I want to catch those devils myself. Afterwards we can alarm the guards!"

"An ideal American!" she surprised him by saying. "Follow me!"

She led him to the doorway. "Stand here, and I will call the Countess. At this side, where it is dark."

She opened the door gently and stood in the light for a second. He saw before him a graceful figure in trailing white, and then he saw her face. She was Miss Guggenslocker!

"My God!" he hoarsely gasped, staggering toward her. "You! You! The Princess?"

"Yes, I am the Princess," she whispered, smiling as she glided away from his side. His eyes went round in his head, his legs seemed to be anywhere but beneath him, he felt as though he were rushing toward the ceiling. For the moment he was actually unconscious. Then his senses rushed back, recalling his mission and his danger.

"She is sleeping so soundly that I fear to awaken her," whispered a soft voice at his back, and he turned. The Princess was standing in the doorway.

"Then pray stand back where you will be out of danger. They will be here in a moment, unless they have been frightened away."

"You shall not expose yourself," she said, positively. "Why should you risk your life *now?* You have accomplished your object. You have saved the Princess!"

"Ah—yes, the Princess!" he said. "And I am sorry you *are* the Princess," he added, in her ear.

"Sh!" she whispered, softly.

The door through which he had first come was softly opened, and they were conscious that some one was entering. Lorry and the Princess stood in the dark shadow of a curtain, she close behind his stalwart figure. He could hear his own heart and hers beating, could feel the warmth of her body,

although it did not touch his. His heart beat with the pride of possession, of power, with the knowledge that he had but to stretch out his hand and touch the one woman in all the world.

Across the dim belt of light from the open doorway in which they stood, crawled the dark figure of a man. Her hand unconsciously touched his back as if seeking reassurance. He shivered beneath its gentle weight. Another form followed the first, pausing in the light to look toward their doorway. The abductor was doubtless remembering the instructions to chloroform the Countess. Then came the odor of chloroform. Oh, if Anguish were only there!

The second figure was lost in the darkness and a faint glow of light came from the canopied bed in the corner. The chloroformer, holding the curtains, had turned his screen-lantern toward the pillow in order to apply the dampened cloth. Now was the time to act!

Pushing the Princess behind the curtain and in the shelter of the door-post, Lorry leaped toward the center of the room, a pistol in each hand. Before him crouched the astonished desperadoes.

"If you move you are dead men!" said he, in slow, decided tones. "Here, Harry!" he shouted. "Scoundrels, you are trapped! Throw up your hands!"

Suddenly the room was a blaze of light; flashing

candles, lamps, sprung into life from the walls, while a great chandelier above his head dazzled him with its unexpected glare.

"Hell!" he shouted, half throwing his hands to his eyes.

Something rushed upon him from behind; there was a scream and then a stinging blow across the head and neck. As he sank helplessly, angrily, to his knees he heard the Princess wail:

"Dannox! Do not strike again! You have killed him!"

As he rolled to the floor he saw the two forms near the bed moving about like shadows; two red objects that resembled dancing telegraph poles leaped past him from he knew not where, and then there was a shout, the report of a pistol, a horrid yell. Something heavy crashed down beside him and writhed. His eyes were closing, his senses were going, he was numb and sleepy. Away off in the distance he heard Harry Anguish crying:

"That settles you, damn you!"

Some one lifted his head from the carpet and a woman's voice was crying something unintelligible. He was conscious of an effort on his part to prevent the blood from streaming over her gown—a last bit of gallantry. The sound of rushing feet, shouts, firearms—oblivion!

. . . . . .

When Lorry regained consciousness he blinked in

abject amazement. There was a dull, whirring sound in his ears, and his eyes had a glaze over them that was slow in wearing off. There were persons in the room. He could see them moving about and could hear them talking. As his eyes tried to take in the strange surroundings, a hand was lifted from his forehead and a soft, dream-like voice said:

"He is recovering, Mr. Anguish. See, his eyes are open! Do you know me, Mr. Lorry?"

The unsteady eyes wandered until they fell upon the face near his pillow. A brighter gleam came into them, and there was a ray of returning intelligence. He tried to speak, but could only move his lips. As he remembered her, she was in white, and he was puzzled now to see her in a garment of some dark material, suggestive of the night or the green of a shady hillside. There was the odor of roses and violets and carnations. Then he looked for the fatal, fearful, glaring chandelier. It was gone. The room was becoming lighter and lighter as his eyes grew stronger, but it was through a window near where he lay. So it was daylight! Where was he?

"How do you feel, old man?" asked a familiar voice. A man sat down beside him on the couch or bed, and a big hand grasped his own. Still he could not answer.

"Doctor," cried the voice near his head, "you really think it is not serious?"

"I am quite sure," answered the man's voice from somewhere out in the light. "It is a bad cut, and he is just recovering from the effect of the ether. Had the blow not been a glancing one his skull would have been crushed. He will be perfectly conscious in a short time. There is no concussion, Your Highness."

"I am so happy to hear you say that," said the soft voice. Lorry's eyes sought hers and thanked her. A lump came into his throat as he looked up into the tender, anxious blue eyes. A thrill came over him. Princess or not, he loved her—he loved her! "You were very brave—oh, *so* brave!" she whispered in his ear, her hand touching his hair caressingly. "My American!"

He tried to reach the hand before it faded, but he was too weak. She glided away, and he closed his eyes again as if in pain.

"Look up, old man; you're all right," said Anguish. "Smell this handkerchief. It will make you feel better." A moist cloth was held beneath his nose, and a strong, pungent odor darted through his nostrils. In a moment he tried to raise himself to his elbow. The world was clearing up.

"Lie still a bit, Lorry. Don't be too hasty. The doctor says you must not."

"Where am I, Harry?" asked the wounded man weakly.

"In the castle. I'll tell you all about it presently."

"Am I in her room?"

"No, but she is in yours. You are across the hall in"—here he whispered—"Uncle Caspar's room. Caspar is a Count."

"And she is the Princess—truly?"

"What luck!"

"What misery—what misery!" half moaned the other.

"Bosh! Be a man! Don't talk so loud, either! There are a half-dozen in the room."

Lorry remained perfectly quiet for ten minutes, his staring eyes fixed on the ceiling. He was thinking of the abyss he had reached and could not cross.

"What time is it?" he asked at last, turning his eyes toward his friend.

"It's just seven o'clock. You have been unconscious or under the influence of ether for over four hours. That guard hit you a fearful crack."

"I heard a shot—a lot of them. Was any one killed? Did those fellows escape?"

"Killed! There have been eight executions besides the one I attended to. Lord, they don't wait long here before handing out justice."

"Tell me all that happened. Was she hurt?"

"I should say not! Say, Gren, I have killed a man. Dannox got my bullet right in the head and he never knew what hit him. Ghastly, isn't it? I feel beastly queer. It was he who turned on the

lights and went at you with a club. I heard you call, and was in the door just as he hit you. His finish came inside of a second. You and he spoiled the handsomest rug I ever saw."

"Ruined it?"

"Not in her estimation. I'll wager she has it framed, blood and all. The stains will always be there as a reminder of your bravery, and that's what she says she's bound to keep. She was very much excited and alarmed about you until the room filled with men and then she remembered how she was attired. I never saw anything so pretty as her embarrassment when the Countess and her aunt led her into the next room. These people are going out, so I'll tell you what happened after you left me with the cook. He was a long time falling under the influence, and I had barely reached the top of the stairs when I saw Dannox rush down the hall. Then you called, and I knew the jig was on in full blast. The door was open, and I saw him strike you. I shot him, but she was at your side before I could get to you. The other fellows who were in the room succeeded in escaping while I was bending over you, but neither of them shot at me. They were too badly frightened. I had sense enough left to follow and shoot a couple of times as they tore down the stairs. One of them stumbled and rolled all the way to the bottom. He was unconscious and bleeding when I reached his side. The other fel-

low flew toward the dining hall, where he was nabbed by two white-uniformed men and throttled. Other men in white—they were regular police officers—pounced upon me, and I was a prisoner. By George, I was knocked off my feet the next minute to see old Dangloss himself come puffing and blowing into the hall, redder and fiercer than ever. 'Now I know what you want in Edelweiss!' he shrieked, and it took me three minutes to convince him of his error. Then he and some of the men went up to the Princess's room, while I quickly led the way to the big gate and directed a half-dozen officers toward the ravine. By this time the grounds were alive with guards. They came up finally with the two fellows who had been stationed beneath the window and who were unable to find the gate. When I got back to where you were the room was full of terrified men and women, half dressed. I was still dazed over the sudden appearance of the police, but managed to tell my story in full to Dangloss and Count Halfont—that's Uncle Caspar—and then the chief told me how he and his men happened to be there. In the meantime, the castle physician was attending to you. Dannox had been carried away. I never talked to a more interested audience in my life! There was the Princess at my elbow and the Countess—pretty as a picture—back of her, all eyes, both of 'em; and there was the old gray-haired lady, the Countess Halfont, and a half-dozen shivering

maids, with men galore, Dangloss and the Count and a lot of servants,—a great and increasing crowd. The captain of the guards, a young fellow named Quinnox, as I heard him called, came in, worried and humiliated. I fancy he was afraid he'd lose his job. You see, it was this way: Old Dangloss has had a man watching us all day. Think of it! Shadowing us like a couple of thieves. This fellow traced us to the castle gate and then ran back for reinforcements, confident that we were there to rob. In twenty minutes he had a squad of officers at the gate, the chief trailing along behind. They found the pile of tools we had left there, and later the other chap in the arbor. A couple of guards came charging up to learn the cause of the commotion, and the whole crew sailed into the castle, arriving just in time. Well, just as soon as I had told them the full story of the plot, old Caspar, the chief and the captain held a short consultation, the result of which I can tell in mighty few words. At six o'clock they took the whole gang of prisoners down in the ravine and shot them. The mounted guards are still looking for the two Viennese who were left with the carriage. They escaped. About an hour after you were hurt you were carried over here and laid on this couch. I want to tell you, Mr. Lorry, you are the most interesting object that ever found its way into a royal household. They have been hanging over you as if you were a new-born baby, and

everybody's charmed because you are a boy and are going to live. As an adventure, this has been a record-breaker, my son! We are cocks of the walk!"

Lorry was smiling faintly over his enthusiasm.

"You are the real hero, Harry. You saved my life, and probably hers. I'll not allow you or anybody to give me the glory," he said, pressing the other's hand.

"Oh, that's nonsense! Anybody could have rushed in as I did. I was only capping the climax you had prepared—merely a timely arrival, as the novels say. There is a little of the credit due me, of course, and I'll take it gracefully, but I only come in as an accessory, a sort of bushwhacker who had only to do the shoot, slap-bang work and close the act. You did the hero's work. But what do you think of the way they hand out justice over here? All but two of 'em dead!"

"Whose plan was it to kill those men?" cried Lorry, suddenly sitting upright.

"Everybody's, I fancy. They didn't consult me, though, come to think of it. Ah, here is Her Royal Highness!"

The Princess and Aunt Yvonne were at his side again, while Count Caspar was coming rapidly toward them.

"You must not sit up, Mr. Lorry," began the Princess, but he was crying:

"Did they make a confession, Harry?"

"I don't know. Did they, Unc—Count Halfont? Did they confess? Great heavens, I never thought of that before."

"What was there to confess?" asked the Count, taking Lorry's hand, kindly. "They were caught in the act. My dear sir, they were not even tried."

"I thought your police chief was such a shrewd man," cried Lorry, angrily.

"What's that?" asked a gruff voice, and Baron Dangloss was a member of the party, red and panting.

"Don't you know you should not have killed those men?" demanded Lorry. They surveyed him in amazement, except Anguish, who had buried his face in his hands dejectedly.

"And, sir, I'd like to know why not?" blustered Dangloss.

"And sir, I'd like to know, since you have shot the only beings on earth who knew the man that hired them, how in the name of your alleged justice are you going to apprehend him?" said Lorry, sinking back on his pillow, exhausted.

No reserve could hide the consternation, embarrassment and shame that overwhelmed a very worthy but very impetuous nobleman, Baron Jasto Dangloss, chief of the police of Edelweiss. He could only sputter his excuses and withdraw, swearing to catch the arch-conspirator or die in the attempt. Not

a soul in the castle, not a being in all Graustark could offer the faintest clew to the identity of the man or explain his motive. No one knew a Michael, who might have been inadvertently addressed as "your" possible "Highness." The greatest wonder reigned; vexation, uneasiness and perplexity existed everywhere.

Standing there with her head on her aunt's shoulder, her face grave and troubled, the Princess asked:

"Why should they seek to abduct me? Was it to imprison or to kill me? Oh, Aunt Yvonne, have I not been good to my people? God knows I have done all that I can. I could have done no more. Is it a conspiracy to force me from the throne? Who can be so cruel?"

And no one could answer. They could simply offer words of comfort and promises of protection. Later in the day gruff Dangloss marched in and apologized to the Americans for his suspicions concerning them, imploring their assistance in running down the chief villain. And as the hours went by Count Halfont came in and, sitting beside Grenfall, begged his pardon and asked him to forget the deception that had been practiced in the United States. He explained the necessity for traveling incognito at that time. After which the Count entered a plea for Her Royal Highness, who had expressed contrition and wished to be absolved.

XI

LOVE IN A CASTLE

As the day wore on Lorry grew irritable and restless. He could not bring himself into full touch with the situation, notwithstanding Harry's frequent and graphic recollections of incidents that had occurred and that had led to their present condition. Their luncheon was served in the Count's room, as it was inadvisable for the injured man to go to the dining hall until he was stronger. The court physician assured him that he would be incapacitated for several days, but that in a very short time his wound would lose the power to annoy him in the least. The Count and Countess Halfont, Anguish and others came to cheer him and to make his surroundings endurable. Still he was dissatisfied, even unhappy.

The cause of his uneasiness and depression was revealed only by the manner in which it was removed. He was lying stretched out on the couch, staring from the window, his head aching, his heart full of a longing that knows but one solace. Anguish had gone out in the grounds after assuring himself that his charge was asleep, so there was no

one in the room when he awakened from a sickening dream to shudder alone over its memory. A cool breeze from an open window fanned his head kindly; a bright sun gleamed across the trees, turning them into gold and purple and red and green; a quiet repose was in all that touched him outwardly; inwardly there was burning turmoil. He turned on his side and curiously felt the bandages about his head. They were tight and smooth, and he knew they were perfectly white. How lonely those bandages made him feel, away off there in Graustark!

The door of his room opened softly, but he did not turn, thinking it was Anguish—always Anguish—and not the one he most desired to——

"Her Royal Highness," announced a maid, and then:

"May I come in?" asked a voice that went to his troubled soul like a cooling draught to the fevered throat. He turned toward her instantly, all the irritation, all the uneasiness, all the loneliness vanishing like mist before the sun. Behind her was a lady-in-waiting.

"I cannot deny the request of a Princess," he responded, smiling gaily. He held forth his hand toward her, half fearing she would not take it.

The Princess Yetive came straight to his couch and laid her hand in his. He drew it to his lips and then released it lingeringly. She stood before him, looking down with an anxiety in her eyes that would

have repaid him had death been there to claim his next breath.

"Are you better?" she asked, with her pretty accent. "I have been so troubled about you."

"I thought you had forgotten me," he said, with childish petulance.

"Forgotten you!" she cried, quick to resent the imputation. "Let me tell you, then, what I have been doing while forgetting. I have sent to the Regengetz for your luggage and your friend's. You will find it much more comfortable here. You are to make this house your home as long as you are in Edelweiss. That is how I have been forgetting."

"Forgive me!" he cried, his eyes gleaming. "I have been so lonely that I imagined all sorts of things. But, Your Highness, you must not expect us to remain here after I am able to leave. That would be imposing——"

"I will not allow you to say it!" she objected, decisively. "You are the guest of honor in Graustark. Have you not preserved its ruler? Was it an imposition to risk your life to save one in whom you had but passing interest, even though she were a poor Princess? No, my American, this castle is yours, in all rejoicing, for had you not come within its doors to-day would have found it in mournful terror. Besides, Mr. Anguish has said he will stay a year if we insist."

"That's like Harry," laughed Lorry. "But I am afraid you are glorifying two rattle-brained chaps who should be in a home for imbeciles instead of in the castle their audacity might have blighted. Our rashness was only surpassed by our phenomenal good luck. By chance it turned out well; there were ten thousand chances of ignominious failure. Had we failed would we have been guests of honor? No! We would have been stoned from Graustark. You don't know how thin the thread was that held your fate. It makes me shudder to think of the crime our act might have been. Ah, had I but known you were the Princess, no chances should have been taken," he said, fervently.

"And a romance spoiled," she laughed.

"So you are a Princess,—a real Princess," he went on, as if he had not heard her. "I knew it. Something told me you were not an ordinary woman——"

"Oh, but I am a very ordinary woman," she remonstrated. "You do not know how easy it is to be a Princess and a mere woman at the same time. I have a heart, a head. I breathe and eat and drink and sleep and love. Is it not that way with other women?"

"You breathe and eat and drink and sleep and love in a different world, though, Your Highness."

"Ach! my little maid, Thérèsa, sleeps as soundly,

eats as heartily and loves as warmly as I, so a fig for your argument."

"You may breathe the same air, but would you love the same man that your maid might love?"

"Is a man the only excuse for love?" she asked. "If so, then I must say that I breathe and eat and drink and sleep—and that is all."

"Pardon me, but some day you will find that love *is* a man, and"—here he laughed—"you will neither breathe, nor eat, nor sleep except with him in your heart. Even a Princess is not proof against a man."

"Is a man proof against a Princess?" she asked, as she leaned against the casement.

"It depends on the"—he paused—"the Princess, I should say."

"Alas! There is one more fresh responsibility acquired. It seems to me that everything depends on the Princess," she said, merrily.

"Not entirely," he said, quickly. "A great deal—a very great deal—depends on circumstances. For instance, when you were Miss Guggenslocker it wouldn't have been necessary for a man to be a Prince, you know."

"But I was Miss Guggenslocker because a man was unnecessary," she said, so gravely that he smiled. "I was without a title because it was more womanly than to be a 'freak,' as I should have been had every man, woman and child looked upon me as

a Princess. I did not travel through your land for the purpose of exhibiting myself, but to learn and unlearn."

"I remember it cost you a certain coin to learn one thing," he observed.

"It was money well spent, as subsequent events have proved. I shall never regret the spending of that half gavvo. Was it not the means of bringing you to Edelweiss?"

"Well, it was largely responsible, but I am inclined to believe that a certain desire on my part would have found a way without the assistance of the coin. You don't know how persistent an American can be."

"Would you have persisted had you known I was a Princess?" she asked.

"Well, I can hardly tell about that, but you must remember I didn't know who or what you were."

"Would you have come to Graustark had you known I was its Princess?"

"I'll admit I came because you were Miss Guggenslocker."

"A mere woman."

"I will not consent to the word 'mere.' What would you think of a man who came half way across the earth for the sake of a *mere* woman?"

"I should say he had a great deal of curiosity," she responded, coolly.

"And not much sense. There is but one woman

a man would do so much for, and she could not be a *mere* woman in his eyes." Lorry's face was white and his eyes gleamed as he hurled this bold conclusion at her.

"Especially when he learns that she is a Princess!" said she, her voice so cold and repellent that his eyes closed involuntarily, as if an unexpected horror had come before them. "You must not tell me that you came to see me."

"But I did come to see *you* and not Her Royal Highness the Princess Yetive of Graustark. How was I to know?" he cried, impulsively.

"But you are no longer ignorant," she said, looking from the window.

"I thought you said you were a mere woman!"

"I am—and that is the trouble!" she said, slowly turning her eyes back to him. Then she abruptly sank to the window seat near his head. "That is the trouble, I say. A woman is a woman, although she be a Princess. Don't you understand why you must not say such things to me?"

"Because you *are* a Princess," he said, bitterly.

"No; because I am a woman. As a woman, I want to hear them, as a Princess I cannot. Now, have I made you understand? Have I been bold enough?" Her face was burning.

"You—you don't mean that you——" he half whispered, drawing himself toward her, his face glowing.

"Ach! What have I said?"

"You have said enough to drive me mad with desire for more," he cried, seizing her hand, which she withdrew instantly, rising to her feet.

"I have only said that I wanted to hear you say you had come to see me. Is not that something for a woman's vanity to value? I am sorry you have presumed to misunderstand me?" She was cold again, but he was not to be baffled.

"Then be a woman and forget that you are a Princess until I tell you why I came," he cried.

"I cannot. I mean, I will not listen to you," she said, glancing about helplessly, yet standing still within the danger circle.

"I came because I have thought of you and dreamed of you since the day you sailed from New York. God, can I ever forget that day!"

"Please do not recall——" she began, blushing and turning to the window.

"The kiss you threw to me? Were you a Princess then?" She did not answer, and he paused for a moment, a thought striking him which at first he did not dare to voice. Then he blurted out: "If you do not want to hear me say these things, why do you stand there?"

"Oh," she faltered.

"Don't leave me now. I want to say what I came over here to say, and then you can go back to your throne and your royal reserve, and I can go back

to the land from which you drew me. I came because I love you. Is not that enough to drag a man to the end of the world? I came to marry you if I could, for you were Miss Guggenslocker to me. Then you were within my reach, but not now! I can only *love* a Princess!" He stopped because she had dropped to the couch beside him, her serious face turned appealingly to his, her fingers clasping his hands fiercely.

"I forbid you to continue—I forbid you! Do you hear? I, too, have thought and dreamed of you, and I have prayed that you might come. But you must not tell me that you love me—you *shall* not!"

"I only want to know that you love me," he whispered.

"Do you think I can tell you the truth?" she cried. "I do *not* love you!"

Before he had fairly grasped the importance of the contradictory sentences, she left his side and stood in the window, her breast heaving and her face flaming.

"Then I am to believe you do," he groaned, after a moment. "I find a Princess and lose a woman!"

"I did not intend that you should have said what you have, or that I should have told you what I have. I knew you loved me or you would not have come to me," she said, softly.

"You would have been selfish enough to enjoy

that knowledge without giving joy in return. I see. What else could you have done? A Princess! Oh, I would to God you were Miss Guggenslocker, the woman I sought!"

"Amen to that!" she said. "Can I trust you never to renew this subject? We have each learned what had better been left unknown. You understand my position. Surely you will be good enough to look upon me ever afterward as a Princess and forget that I have been a woman unwittingly. I ask you, for your sake and my own, to refrain from a renewal of this unhappy subject. You can see how hopeless it is for both of us. I have said much to you that I trust you will cherish as coming from a woman who could not have helped herself and who has given you the power to undo her with a single word. I know you will always be the brave, true man my heart has told me you are. You will let the beginning be the end?"

The appeal was so earnest, so noble that honor swelled in his heart and came from his lips in this promise:

"You may trust me, Your Highness. Your secret is worth a thousand-fold more than mine. It is sacred with me. The joy of my life has ended, but the happiness of knowing the truth will never die. I shall remember that you love me—yes, I know you do—and I shall never forget to love you. I will not promise that I shall never speak of it again to

you. As I lie here, there comes to me a courage I did not know I could feel."

"No, no!" she cried, vehemently.

"Forgive me! You can at least let me say that as long as I live I may cherish and encourage a little hope that all is not dead. Your Highness, let me say that my family never knows when it is defeated, either in love or in war."

"The walls which surround the heart of a Princess are black and grim, impenetrable when she defends it, my boasting American," she said, smiling sadly.

"Yet some Prince of the realm will batter down the wall and win at a single blow that which a *mere* man could not conquer in ten lifetimes. Such is the world."

"The Prince may batter down and seize, but he can never conquer. But enough of this! I am the Princess of Graustark; you are my friend, Grenfall Lorry, and there is only a dear friendship between us," she cried, resuming her merry humor so easily that he started with surprise and not a little displeasure.

"And a throne," he added, smiling, however.

"And a promise," she reminded him.

"From which I trust I may some day be released," said he, sinking back, afflicted with a discouragement and a determination of equal power. He could see hope and hopelessness ahead.

"By death!"

"No; by life! It may be sooner than you think!"

"You are forgetting your promise already."

"Your Highness's pardon," he begged.

They laughed, but their hearts were sad, this luckless American and hapless sovereign who would, if she could, be a woman.

"It is now three o'clock—the hour when you were to have called to see me," she said, again sitting unconcernedly before him in the window seat. She was not afraid of him. She was a Princess.

"I misunderstood you, Your Highness. I remembered the engagement, but it seems I was mistaken as to the time. I came at three in the morning!"

"And found me at home!"

"In an impregnable castle, with ogres all about."

XII

A WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Lorry was removed to another room before dinner, as she had promised.

After they had dined the two strangers were left alone for several hours. Anguish regaled his friend with an enthusiastic dissertation on the charms of the Countess Dagmar, lady-in-waiting to the Princess. In conclusion he said glowingly, his cigar having been out for half an hour or more because his energy had been spent in another direction:

"You haven't seen much of her, Lorry, but I tell you she is rare. And she's not betrothed to any of these confounded Counts or Dukes either. They all adore her, but she's not committed."

"How do you know all this?" demanded Lorry, who but half heard through his dreams.

"Asked her, of course. How in thunder do you suppose?"

"And you've known her but a day? Well, you *are* progressive."

"Oh, perfectly natural conversation, you know," explained Anguish, composedly. "She began it by asking me if I were married, and I said I wasn't even engaged. Then I asked her if she were mar-

ried. You see, from the title, you can't tell whether a Countess is married or single. She said she wasn't, and I promptly and very properly expressed my amazement. By Jove, she has a will and a mind of her own, that young woman has. She's not going to marry until she finds a man of the right sort—which is refreshing. I like to hear a girl talk like that, especially a pretty girl who can deal in Princes, Counts and all kinds of nobility when it comes to a matrimonial trade. By Jove, I'm sorry for the Princess, though."

"Sorry for the Princess? Why?" asked the other, alert at once.

"Oh, just because it's not in her power to be so independent. The Countess says she cries every night when she thinks of what the poor girl has to contend with."

"Tell me about it."

"I don't know anything to tell. I'm not interested in the Princess, and I didn't have the nerve to ask many questions. I do know, however, that she is going to have an unpleasant matrimonial alliance forced upon her in some way."

"That is usual."

"That's what I gather from the Countess. Maybe you can pump the Countess and get all you want to know in connection with the matter. It's a pretty serious state of affairs, I should say, or she wouldn't be weeping through sympathy."

Lorry recalled a part of the afternoon's sweetly dangerous conversation and the perspiration stood cold and damp on his brow.

"Well, old man, you've chased Miss Guggenslocker to earth only to find her an impossibility. Pretty hopeless for you, Lorry, but don't let it break you up completely. We can go back home after a while and you will forget her. A Countess, of course, is different."

"Harry, I know it is downright madness for me to act like this," said Lorry, his jaws set and his hands clinched as he raised himself to his elbow. "You don't know how much I love her."

"Your nerve is to be admired, but—well, I'm sorry for you."

"Thanks for your sympathy. I suppose I'll need it," and he sank back gloomily. Anguish was right —absurdly right.

There was a rap at the door and Anguish hastened to open it. A servant presented Count Halfont's compliments and begged leave to call.

"Shall we see the old boy?" asked Harry.

"Yes, yes," responded the other. The servant understood the sign made by Anguish and disappeared. "Diplomatic call, I suspect."

"He is the Prime Minister, I understand. Well, we'll diplome with him until bedtime, if he cares to stay. I'm getting rather accustomed to the nobility. They are not so bad, after all. Friendly and all

that—— Ah, good-evening, Your Excellency! We are honored."

The Count had entered the room and was advancing toward the couch, tall, easy and the personification of cordiality.

"I could not retire until I had satisfied myself as to Mr. Lorry's condition and his comfort," said he, in his broken English. He seated himself near the couch and bent sharp, anxious eyes on the recumbent figure.

"Oh, he's all right," volunteered Anguish, readily. "Be able to go into a battle again to-morrow."

"That is the way with you aggressive Americans, I am told. They never give up until they are dead," said the Count, courteously. "Your head is better?"

"It does not pain me as it did, and I'm sure I'll be able to get out to-morrow. Thank you very much for your interest," said Lorry. "May I inquire after the health of the Countess Halfont? The excitement of last night has not had an unpleasant effect, I hope."

"She is with the Princess, and both are quite well. Since our war, gentlemen, Graustark women have nothing to acquire in the way of courage and endurance. You, of course, know nothing of the horrors of that war."

"But we would be thankful for the story of it, Your Excellency. War is a hobby of mine. I read

every war scare that gets into print," said Anguish, eagerly.

"We, of Graustark, at present have every reason to recall the last war and bitterly to lament its ending. The war occurred just fifteen years ago—but will the recital tire you, Mr. Lorry? I came to spend a few moments socially and not to go into history. At any other time I shall be——"

"It will please and not tire me. I am deeply interested. Pray go on," Lorry hastened to say, for he was interested more than the Count suspected.

"Fifteen years ago Prince Ganlook, of this principality,—the father of our Princess,—became incensed over the depredations of the Axphain soldiers who patrolled our border on the north. He demanded restitution for the devastation they had created, but was refused. Graustark is a province comprising some eight hundred square miles of the best land in this part of the world. Our neighbor is smaller in area and population. Our army was better equipped but not so hardy. For several months the fighting in the north was in our favor, but the result was that our forces were finally driven back to Edelweiss, hacked and battered by the fierce thousands that came over the border. The nation was staggered by the shock, for such an outcome had not been considered possible. We had been too confident. Our soldiers were sick and worn by six months of hard fighting, and the men of Edelweiss

—the merchants, the laborers and the nobility itself—flew to arms in defense of the city. For over a month we fought, hundreds of our best and bravest citizens going down to death. They at last began a bombardment of the city. To-day you can see the marks on nearly every house in Edelweiss. Hundreds of graves in the valley to the south attest the terrors of that siege. The castle was stormed, and Prince Ganlook, with many of the chief men of the land, met death. The Prince was killed in front of the castle gates, from which he had sallied in a last brave attempt to beat off the conquerors. A bronze statue now marks the spot on which he fell. The Princess, his wife, was my sister, and as I held the portfolio of finance, it was through me that the city surrendered, bringing the siege to an end. Fifteen years ago this autumn—the twentieth of November, to be explicit—the treaty of peace was signed in Sofia. We were compelled to cede a portion of territory in the far northwest, valuable for its mines. Indemnity was agreed upon by the peace commissioners, amounting to 20,000,000 gavvos, or nearly $30,000,000 in your money. In fifteen years this money was to be paid, with interest. On the twentieth of November, this year, the people of Graustark must pay 25,000,000 gavvos. The time is at hand, and that is why we recall the war so vividly. It means the bankruptcy of the nation, gentlemen."

Neither of his listeners spoke for some moments. Then Lorry broke the silence.

"You mean that the money cannot be raised?" he asked.

"It is not in our treasury. Our people have been taxed so sorely in rebuilding their homes and in recuperating from the effect of that dreadful invasion that they have been unable to pay the levies. You must remember that we are a small nation and of limited resources. Your nation could secure $30,000,000 in one hour for the mere asking. To us it is like a death blow. I am not betraying a State secret in telling you of the sore straits in which we are placed, for every man in the nation has been made cognizant of the true conditions. We are all facing it together."

There was something so quietly heroic in his manner that both men felt pity. Anguish, looking at the military figure, asked:

"You fought through the war, Your Excellency?"

"I resigned as Minister, sir, to go to the front. I was in the first battle and I was in the last," he said, simply.

"And the Princess,—the present ruler, I mean,—was a mere child at that time. When did she succeed to the throne?" asked Lorry.

"Oh, the great world does not remember our little history! Within a year after the death of Prince

Ganlook, his wife, my sister, passed away, dying of a broken heart. Her daughter, their only child, was, according to our custom, crowned at once. She has reigned for fourteen years, and wisely since assuming full power. For three years she has been ruler de facto. She has been frugal, and has done all in her power to meet the shadow that is descending."

"And what is the alternative in case the indemnity is not paid?" asked Lorry, breathlessly, for he saw something bright in the approaching calamity.

"The cession of all that part of Graustark lying north of Edelweiss, including fourteen towns, all of our mines and our most productive farming and grazing lands. In that event Graustark will be no larger than one of the good-sized farms in your Western country. There will be nothing left for Her Royal Highness to rule save a tract so small that the word principality will be a travesty and a jest. This city and twenty-five miles to the south, a strip about one hundred and fifty miles long. Think of it! Twenty-five by one hundred and fifty miles, and yet called a principality! Once the proudest and most prosperous State in the East, considering its size, reduced to that! Ach, gentlemen—gentlemen! I cannot think of it without tearing out a heart-string and suffering such pains as mortal man has never endured. I lived in Graustark's days of wealth, power and supremacy; God has condemned

me to live in the days of her dependency, weakness and poverty. Let us talk no more of this unpleasant subject."

His hearers pitied the frank, proud old man from the bottom of their hearts. He had told them the story with the candor and simplicity of a child, admitting weakness and despondency. Still he sat erect and defiant, his face white and drawn, his figure suggesting the famous picture of the stag at bay.

"Willingly, Your Excellency, since it is distasteful to you. I hope, however, you will permit me to ask how much you are short of the amount," said Lorry, considerately, yet curiously.

"Our Minister of Finance, Gaspon, will be able to produce fifteen million gavvos at the stated time —far from enough. This amount has been sucked from the people from excessive levy, and has been hoarded for the dreaded day. Try as we would, it has been impossible to raise the full amount. The people have been bled and have responded nobly, sacrificing everything to meet the treaty terms honorably, but the strain has been too great. Our army has cost us large sums. We have strengthened our defenses, and could, should we go to war, defeat Axphain. But we have our treaty to honor; we could not take up arms to save ourselves from that honest bond. Our levies have barely brought the amount necessary to maintain an army large enough

to inspire respect among those who are ready to leap upon us the instant we show the least sign of distress. There are about us powers that have held aloof from war with us simply because we have awed them with our show of force. It has been our safeguard, and there is not a citizen of Graustark who objects to the manner in which State affairs are conducted. They know that our army is an economy at any price. Until last spring we were confident that we could raise the full amount due Axphain, but the people in the rural districts were unable to meet the levies on account of the panic that came at a most unfortunate time. That is why we were hurrying home from your country, Mr. Lorry. Gaspon had cabled the Princess that affairs were in a hopeless condition, begging her to come home and do what she could in a final appeal to the people, knowing the love they had for her. She came, and has seen these loyal subjects offer their lives for her and for Graustark, but utterly unable to give what they have not—money. She asked them if she should disband the army, and there was a negative wail from one end of the land to the other. Then the army agreed to serve on halt pay until all was tided over. Public officers are giving their services free, and many of our wealthy people have advanced loans on bonds, worthless as they may seen, and still we have not the required amount."

"Cannot the loan be extended a few years?" asked Lorry, angry with the ruler in the North, taking the woes of Graustark as much to heart as if they were his own.

"Not one day! Not in London, Paris, nor Berlin."

Lorry lay back and allowed Anguish to lead the conversation into other channels. The Count remained for half an hour, saying as he left that the Princess and his wife had expressed a desire to be remembered to their guests.

"Her Royal Highness spent the evening with the Ministers of Finance and War, and her poor head, I doubt not, is racking from the effects of the consultation. These are weighty matters for a girl to have on her hands," solemnly stated the Count, pausing for an instant at the door of the apartment.

After he had closed it, the Americans looked long and thoughtfully at each other, each feeling a respect for the grim old gentleman that they had never felt for man before.

"So they are in a devil of a shape," mused Anguish. "I tell you, Gren, I never knew anything that made me feel so badly as does the trouble that hangs over that girl and her people. A week ago I wouldn't have cared a rap for Graustark, but tonight I feel like weeping for her."

"There seems to be no help for her, either," said Lorry, reflectively.

"Graustark, you mean?"

"No—I mean yes, of course,—who else?" demanded the other, who certainly had not meant Graustark.

"I believe, confound your selfish soul, you'd like to see the nation, the crown and everything else, taken away from this helpless, harassed child. Then you'd have a chance," exclaimed Anguish, pacing the floor, half angrily, half encouragingly.

"Don't say that, Harry, don't say that. Don't accuse me of it, for I'll confess I had in my heart that meanest of longings—the selfish, base, heartless hope that you have guessed. It hurts me to be accused of it though, so don't do it again, old man. I'll put away the miserable hope, if I can, and I'll pray God that she may find a way out of the difficulty."

They went to sleep that night, Anguish at once, Lorry not for hours, harboring a determination to learn more about the condition of affairs touching the people of Graustark and the heart of their Princess.

XIII

UNDER MOON AND MONASTERY

For two days Lorry lived through intermittent stages of delight and despondency. His recovery from the effects of the blow administered by Dannox was naturally rapid, his strong young constitution coming to the rescue bravely. He saw much of the Princess, more of the Countess Dagmar, and made the acquaintance of many lords and ladies for whom he cared but little except when they chose to talk of their girlish ruler. The atmosphere of the castle was laden with a depression that could not be overcome by an assimilated gaiety. There was the presence of a shadow that grew darker and nearer as the days went by, and there were anxious hearts under the brave, proud spirits of those who held the destiny of Graustark in their hands.

The Princess could not hide the trouble that had sprung up in her eyes. Her laugh, her gay conversation, her rare composure and gentle hauteur were powerless to drive away the haunted, worried gleam in those expressive eyes of blue. Lorry had it on his tongue's end a dozen times during the next day or so after the Count's narrative to question her

about the condition of affairs as they appeared to her. He wondered whether she, little more than a girl, could see and understand the enormity of the situation that confronted her and her people. A strange, tender fear prevented him from speaking to her of the thing which was oppressing her life. Not that he expected a rebuff from her, but that he could not endure the thought of hearing her brave, calm recital of the merciless story. He knew that she could narrate it all to him more plainly than had her uncle. Something told him that she was fully aware of the real and underlying conditions. He could see, in his imagination, the proud, resigned face and manner of this perplexed Princess, as she would have talked to him of her woes, and he could also picture the telltale eyes and the troubled expression that would not be disguised.

The Countess Dagmar, when monopolized by the very progressive, or aggressive, Anguish, unfolded to Lorry certain pages in the personal history of the Princess, and he, of course, encouraged her confidential humor, although there was nothing encouraging in it for him.

Down by the great fountain, while the soldiers were on parade, the fair but volatile Countess unfolded to Lorry a story that wrenched his heart so savagely that anger, resentment, helplessness and love oozed forth and enveloped him in a multitude of emotions that would not disperse. To have gone

to the Princess and laid down his life to save her would have given him pleasure, but he had promised something to her that could not be forgotten in a day. In his swelling heart he prayed for the time to come when he could take her in his arms, cancel his promise and defy the troubles that opposed her.

"She will not mind my telling you, because she considers you the very best of men, Mr. Lorry," said the Countess, who had learned her English under the Princess Yetive's tutor. The demure, sympathetic little Countess, her face glowing with excitement and indignation, could not resist the desire to pour into the ears of this strong and resourceful man the secrets of the Princess, as if trusting to him, the child of a powerful race, to provide relief. It was the old story of the weak appealing to the strong.

It seems, according to the very truthful account given by the lady, that the Princess had it in her power to save Graustark from disgrace and practical destruction. The Prince of Axphain's son, Lorenz, was deeply enamoured of her, infatuated by her marvelous beauty and accomplishments. He had persuaded his father to consider a matrimonial alliance with her to be one of great value to Axphain. The old Prince, therefore, some months before the arrival of the Americans in Graustark, sent to the Princess a substitute ultimatum, couched in

terms so polite and conciliatory that there could be no mistaking his sincerity. He agreed to give Graustark a new lease of life, as it were, by extending the fifteen years, or, in other words, to grant the conquered an additional ten years in which to pay off the obligations imposed by the treaty. He furthermore offered a considerable reduction in the rate of interest for the next ten years. But he had a condition attached to this good and gracious proposition; the marriage of Graustark's sovereign. His Ambassador set forth the advantages of such an alliance, and departed with a message that the matter should have most serious consideration.

The old Prince's proposition was a blow to the Princess, who was placed in a trying position. By sacrificing herself she could save her country, but in so doing her life was to be plunged into interminable darkness. She did not love, nor did she respect Lorenz, who was not favorably supplied with civilized intelligence. The proposition was laid before the Cabinet and the nobility by the Princess herself, who said that she would be guided by any decision they might reach. The counsellors, to a man, refused to sacrifice their girlish ruler, and the people vociferously ratified the resolution. But the Princess would not allow them to send an answer to Axphain until she could see a way clear to save her people in some other manner. An embassy was sent to the Prince of Dawsbergen. His domain

touched Graustark on the south, and he ruled a wild, turbulent class of mountaineers and herdsmen. The embassy sought to secure an endorsement of the loan from Prince Gabriel sufficient to meet the coming crisis. Gabriel, himself smitten by the charms of the Princess, at once offered himself in marriage, agreeing to advance, in case she accepted him, twenty million gavvos, at a rather high rate of interest, for fifteen years. His love for her was so great that he would pawn the entire principality for an answer that would make him the happiest man on earth. Now, the troubled Princess abhorred Gabriel. Of the two, Lorenz was much to be preferred. Gabriel flew into a rage upon the receipt of this rebuff, and openly avowed his intention to make her suffer. His infatuation became a mania, and, up to the very day on which the Countess told the story, he persisted in his appeals to the Princess. In person he had gone to her to plead his suit, on his knees, grovelling at her feet. He went so far as to exclaim madly in the presence of the alarmed but relentless object of his love that he would win her or turn the whole earth into everything unpleasant.

So it was that the Princess of Graustark, erstwhile Miss Guggenslocker, was being dragged through the most unhappy affairs that ever beset a sovereign. Within a month she was to sign away two-thirds of her domain, transforming multitudes

of her beloved and loving people into subjects of the hated Axphain, or to sell herself, body and soul, to a loathsome bidder in the guise of a suitor. And, with all this confronting her, she had come to the realization of a truth so sad and distracting that it was breaking her tortured heart. She was in love—but with no royal Prince! Of this, however, the Countess knew nothing, so Lorry had one great secret to cherish alone.

"Has she chosen the course she will pursue?" asked Lorry, as the Countess concluded her story. His face was turned away.

"She cannot decide. We have wept together over this dreadful, this horrible thing. You do not know what it means to all of us, Mr. Lorry. We love her, and there is not one in our land who would sacrifice her to save this territory. As for Gabriel, Graustark would kill her before she should go to him. Still, she cannot let herself sacrifice those Northern subjects when by a single act she can save them. You see, the Princess has not forgotten that her father brought this war upon the people, and she feels it her duty to pay the penalty of his error, whatever the cost."

"Is there no other to whom she can turn—no other course?" asked Lorry.

"There is none who would assist us, bankrupt as we are. There is a question I want to ask, Mr. Lorry. Please look at me—do not stare at the

fountain all the time. Why have you come to Edelweiss?" She asked the question so boldly that his startled embarrassment was an unspoken confession. He calmed himself and hesitated long before answering, weighing his reply. She sat close beside him, her clear gray eyes reading him like a book.

"I came to see a Miss Guggenslocker," he answered at last.

"For what purpose? There must have been an urgent cause to bring you so far. You are not an American banker?"

"I had intended to ask her to be my wife," he said, knowing that secrecy was useless and seeing a faint hope.

"You did not find Miss Guggenslocker."

"No. I have not found her."

"And are you going home disappointed, Mr. Lorry, because she is not here?"

"I leave the answer to your tender imagination."

There was a long pause.

"May I ask when you expect to leave Graustark?" she asked, somewhat timidly.

"Why do you wish to know?" he asked in turn.

"Because I know how hopeless your quest has been. You have found Miss Guggenslocker, but she is held behind a wall so strong and impregnable that you cannot reach her with the question you came to ask. You have come to that wall, and now you must turn back. I have asked, how soon?"

"Not until your Princess bids me take up my load and go. You see, my lady, I love to sit beneath the shadow of the wall you describe. It will require a royal edict to compel me to abandon my position."

"You cannot expect the Princess to drive you from her country,—you who have done so much for her. You must go, Mr. Lorry, without her bidding."

"I must?"

"Yes, for your presence outside that wall may make the imprisonment all the more unendurable for the one your love cannot reach. Do you understand me?"

"Has the one behind the wall instructed you to say this to me?" he asked, miserably.

"She has not. I do not know her heart, but I am a woman and have a woman's foresight. If you wish to be kind and good to her, go!"

"I cannot!" he exclaimed, his pent feelings bursting forth. "I cannot go!"

"You will not be so selfish and so cruel as to increase the horror of the wreck that is sure to come," she said, drawing back.

"You know, Countess, of the life-saving crews who draw from the wrecks of ships lives that were hopelessly lost? There is to be a wreck here; is there to be a life-saver? When the night is darkest, the sea wildest, when hope is gone, is not that the time when rescue is most precious? Tell me, you know all there is of this approaching disaster?"

"I cannot command you to leave Edelweiss; I can only tell you that you will have something to answer for if you stay," said the Countess.

"Will you help me if I show you that I can reach the wreck and save the one who clings to it despairingly?" he asked, smiling, suddenly calm and confident.

"Willingly, for I love the one who is going down in the sea. I have spoken to you seriously, though, and I trust you will not misunderstand me. I like you and I like Mr. Anguish. You could stay here forever so far as I am concerned."

He thought long and intently over what she had said as he smoked his cigar on the great balcony that night. In his heart he knew he was adding horror, but that persistent hope of the life-saver came up fresh and strong to combat the argument. He saw, in one moment, the vast chasm between the man and the Princess; in the next, he laughed at the puny space.

Down on the promenade he could see the figures of men and women strolling in the moonlight. To his ears came the occasional laugh of a man, the silvery gurgle of a woman. The royal military band was playing in the stand near the edge of the great circle. There was gaiety, comfort, charm and security about everything that came to his eyes and ears. Was it possible that this peace, unruffled, was so near its end?

He smiled as he heard Harry Anguish laugh gaily

in his good old way, his ringing tones mingling with a woman's. There was no trouble in the hearts of the Countess and his blithe comrade. Behind him rose the grim castle walls, from the windows of which, here and there, gleamed the lights of the night. Where was she? He had seen her in the afternoon and had talked with her, had walked with her. Their conversation had been bright, but of the commonplace kind. She had said nothing to indicate that she remembered the hour spent beside his couch a day or so before; he had uttered none of the words that struggled to rush from his lips,—the questions, the pleadings, the vows. Where was she now? Not in that gay crowd below, for he had scanned every figure with the hawk's eye. Closeted again, no doubt, with her Ministers, wearying her tired brain, her brave heart into fatigue without rest.

Her court still trembled with the excitement of the daring attempt of the abductors and their swift punishment. Functionaries flocked to Edelweiss to inquire after the welfare of the Princess, and indignation was at the highest pitch. There were theories innumerable as to the identity of the arch-conspirator. Baron Dangloss was at sea completely. He cursed himself and everybody else for the hasty and ill-timed execution of the hirelings. It was quite evident that the buzzing wonder and intense feeling of the people had for the moment driven out all

thought of the coming day of judgment and its bitter atonement for all Graustark. To-day the castle was full of the nobility, drawn to its walls by the news that had startled them beyond all expression. The police were at work, the military trembled with rage, the people clamored for the apprehension of the man who had been the instigator of this audacity. The general belief was that some brigand chief from the South had planned the great theft for the purpose of securing a fabulous ransom. Grenfall Lorry had an astonishing theory in his mind, and the more he thought it over the more firmly it was imbedded.

The warm, blue coils from the cigar wafted away into the night, carrying with them a myriad of tangled thoughts,—of her, of Axphain, of the abductor, of himself, of everything. A light step on the stone floor of the shadowy balcony attracted his attention. He turned his head—and saw the Princess Yetive. She was walking slowly toward the balustrade, not aware of his presence. There was no covering for the dark hair, no wrap about the white shoulders. She wore an exquisite gown of white, shimmering with reflections from the moon that scaled the mountain top. She stood at the balustrade, her hands clasping a bouquet of red roses, her chin lifted, her eyes gazing toward the mountain's crest, the prettiest picture he had ever seen. The strange dizziness of love overpowered him. His hungry eyes glanced upward towards the sky

which she was blessing with her gaze, and beheld another picture, gloomy, grim, cheerless.

Against the moonlit screen of the universe clung the black tower of that far-away monastery in the clouds, the home of the monks of Saint Valentine. Out of the world, above the world, a part of the sky itself, it stood like the spectre of a sentinel whose ghostly guardianship appalled and yet soothed.

He could not, would not, move. To have done so meant the desecration of a picture so delicate that a breath upon its surface would have swept it forever from the vision. How long he revelled in the glory of the picture he knew not, for it was as if he looked from a dream. At last he saw her look down upon the roses, lift them slowly and drop them over the rail. They fell to the ground below. He thought he understood; the gift of a Prince despised.

They were not twenty feet apart. He advanced to her side, his hat in one hand, his stick—the one that felled the Viennese—trembling in the other.

"I did not know you were here," she exclaimed, in half frightened amazement. "I left my ladies inside."

He was standing beside her, looking down into the eyes.

"And I am richer because of your ignorance," he said, softly. "I have seen a picture that shall never leave my memory—never! Its beauty enthralled, enraptured. Then I saw the drama of the roses

Ah, Your Highness, the crown is not always a mask."

"The roses were—were of no consequence," she faltered.

"I have heard how you stand between two suitors and that wretched treaty. My heart ached to tell you how I pity you."

"It is not pity I need, but courage. Pity will not aid me in my duty, Mr. Lorry. It stands plainly before me, this duty, but I have not the courage to take it up and place it about my neck forever."

"You do not, cannot love this Lorenz?" he asked.

"Love him!" she cried. "Ach, I forget! You do not know him. Yet I shall doubtless be his wife." There was an eternity of despair in that low, steady voice.

"You shall not! I swear you shall not!"

"Oh, he is a Prince! I must accept the offer that means salvation to Graustark. Why do you make it harder with torture which you think is kindness. Listen to me. Next week I am to give my answer. He will be here, in this castle. My father brought this calamity upon Graustark; I must lift it from the people. What has my happiness to do with it?"

Her sudden strength silenced him, crushed him with the real awakening of helplessness. He stood beside her, looking up at the cold monastery, strangely conscious that she was gazing toward the same dizzy height.

"It looks so peaceful up there," she said at last.

"But so cold and cheerless," he added, drearily. There was another long silence in which two hearts communed through the medium of that faraway sentinel. "They have not discovered a clue to the chief abductor, have they?" he asked, in an effort to return to his proper sphere.

"Baron Dangloss believes he has a clue—a meager and unsatisfactory one, he admits—and to-day sent officers to Ganlook to investigate the actions of a strange man who was there last week, a man who styled himself the Count of Arabazon, and who claimed to be of Vienna. Some Austrians had been hunting stags and bears in the North, however, and it is possible he is one of them." She spoke slowly, her eyes still bent on the home of the monks.

"Your Highness, I have a theory, a bold and perhaps a criminal theory, but you will allow me to tell you why I am possessed of it. I am aware that there is a Prince Gabriel. It is my opinion that no Viennese is guilty, nor are the brigands to be accused of this masterpiece in crime. Have you thought how far a man may go to obtain his heart's desire?"

She looked at him instantly, her eyes wide with growing comprehension, the solution to the mystery darting into her mind like a flash.

"You mean——" she began, stopping as if afraid to voice the suspicion.

"That Prince Gabriel is the man who bought your

guards and hired Geddos and Ostrom to carry you to the place where he could own you, whether you would or no," said Lorry.

"But he could never have forced me to marry him, and I should, sooner or later, have exposed him," she whispered, argumentatively. "He could not expect me to be silent and submit to a marriage under such circumstances. He knows that I would denounce him, even at the altar."

"You do not appreciate my estimate of that gentleman."

"What is to become of me!" she almost sobbed, in an anguish of fear. "I see now—I see plainly! It was Gabriel, and he would have done as you say." A shudder ran through her figure, and he tenderly whispered in her ear:

"The danger is past. He can do no more, Your Highness. Were I positive that he is the man—and I believe he is—I would hunt him down this night."

Her eyes closed happily under his gaze, her hand dropped timidly from his arm and a sweet sense of security filled her soul.

"I am not afraid," she murmured.

"Because I am here?" he asked, bending nearer.

"Because God can bless with the same hand that punishes," she answered, enigmatically, lifting her lashes again, and looking into his eyes with a love at last unmasked. "He gives me a man to love and denies me happiness. He makes of me a woman,

but He does not unmake me a Princess. Through you, He thwarts a villain; through you, He crushes the innocent. More than ever, I thank you for coming into my life. You and you alone, guided by the God who loves and despises me, saved me from Gabriel."

"I only ask——" he began, eagerly, but she interrupted.

"You should not ask anything, for I have said I cannot pay. I owe to you all I have, but cannot pay the debt."

"I shall not again forget," he murmured.

"To-morrow, if you like, I will take you over the castle and let you see the squalor in which I exist,—my throne room, my chapel, my banquet hall, my ball room, my conservatory, my sepulchre. You may say it is wealth, but I shall call it poverty," she said, after they had watched the black monastery cut a square corner from the moon's circle.

"To-morrow, if you will be so kind."

"Perhaps I may be poorer after I have saved Graustark," she said.

"I would to God I could save you from that!" he said.

"I would to God you could," she said. Her manner changed suddenly. She laughed gaily, turning a light face to his. "I hear your friend's laugh out there in the darkness. It is delightfully infectious."

XIV

THE EPISODE OF THE THRONE ROOM

"This is the throne room. Allode!"

The Princess Yetive paused before two massive doors. It was the next afternoon, and she had already shown him the palace of a Queen—the hovel of a pauper!

Through the afternoon not one word other than those which might have passed between good friends escaped the lips of either. He was all interest, she all graciousness. Allode, the sturdy guard, swung open the doors, drew the curtain, and stood aside for them to pass. Into the quiet hall she led him, a Princess in a gown of gray, a courtier in tweeds. Inside the doors he paused.

"And I thought you were Miss Guggenslocker," he said. She laughed with the glee of a child who had charmed and delighted through surprise.

"Am I not a feeble mite to sit on that throne and rule all that comes within its reach?" She directed his attention to the throne at the opposite end of the hall. "From its seat I calmly instruct gray-haired statesmen, weigh their wisdom and pass upon it as if I were Demosthenes, challenge the evils that may

drive monarchs mad, and wonder if my crown is on straight."

"Let me be Ambassador from the United States and kneel at the throne, Your Highness."

"I could not engage in a jest with the crown my ancestors wore, Mr. Lorry. It is sacred, thou thoughtless American. Come, we will draw nearer, that you may see the beauty of the workmanship in that great old chair."

They stood at the base of the low, velveted stage on which stood the chair, with its high back, its massive arms and legs ashimmer in the light from the lofty windows. It was of gold, inlaid with precious stones—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires and other wondrous jewels—a relic of ancient Graustark.

"I never sit in the center. Always at one side or the other, usually leaning my elbow on the arm. You see, the discussions are generally so long and dreary that I become fatigued. One time,—I am ashamed to confess it,—I went to sleep on the throne. That was long ago. I manage to keep awake very well of late. Do you like my throne room?"

"And to think that it is yours!"

"It is this room that gives me the right to be hailed with 'Long live the Princess!' Not with campaign yells and 'Hurrah for Yetive!' How does that sound? 'Hurrah for Yetive!'" She was laughing merrily.

"Don't say it! It sounds sacrilegious—revolting!"

"For over three years—since I was eighteen—I have been supreme in that chair. During the years of my reign prior to that time I sat there with my Uncle Caspar standing beside me. How often I begged him to sit down with me! There was so much room and he certainly must have grown tired of standing. One time I cried because he frowned at me when I persisted in the presence of a great assemblage of nobles from Dawsbergen. It seems that it was a most important audience that I was granting, but I thought more of my uncle's tired old legs. I remember saying, through my sobs of mortification, that I would have him beheaded. You are to guess whether that startling threat created consternation or mirth."

"What a whimsical little Princess you must have been, weeping and pouting and going to sleep," he laughed. "And how sedate and wise you have become."

"Thank you. How very nice you are. I have felt all along that some one would discern my effort to be dignified and sedate. They say I am wise and good and gracious, but that is to be expected. They said that of sovereigns as far back as the deluge, I've heard. Would you really like to see me in that old chair?" she asked.

"Ah, you are still a woman," he said, smiling at

her pretty vanity. "Nothing could impress me more pleasantly."

She stepped carelessly and impulsively upon the royal platform, leaned against the arm of the throne, and with the charming blush of consciousness turned to him with the quickness of a guilty conscience, eager to hear his praise but fearful lest he secretly condemned her conceit. His eyes were burning with the admiration that knows no defining, and his breath came quick and sharp through parted lips. He involuntarily placed a foot upon the bottom step as if to spring to her side.

"You must not come up here!" she cried, shrinking back, her hands extended in fluttering remonstrance. "I cannot permit that, at all!"

"I beg your pardon," he cried. "That is all the humble plebeian can say. That I may be more completely under this fairy spell, pray cast about yourself the robe of rank and take up the sceptre. Perhaps I may fall upon my face."

"And hurt your head all over again," she said, laughing nervously. She hesitated for a moment, a perplexed frown crossing her brow. Then she jerked a rich robe from the back of the throne and placed it about her shoulders as only a woman can. Taking up the sceptre, she stood before the great chair, and, with a smile on her lips, held it above his head, saying softly:

"Graustark welcomes the American Prince."

He sank to his knees before the real Princess, kissed the hem of her robe and arose with face pallid. The chasm was now endless in its immensity. The Princess gingerly seated herself on the throne, placed her elbow on the broad arm, her white chin in her hand, and tranquilly surveyed the voiceless American Prince.

"You have not said, 'Thank you,' " she said, finally, her eyes wavering beneath his steady gaze.

"I am only thinking how easy it would be to cross the gulf that lies between us. With two movements of my body I can place it before you, with a third I can be sitting at your side. It is not so difficult, after all," he said hungrily eyeing the broad chair.

"No man, unless a Prince, ever sat upon this throne," she said.

"You have called me a Prince."

"Oh, I jested," she cried quickly, comprehending his intention. "I forbid you!"

Her command came too late, for he was beside her on the throne of Graustark! She sat perfectly rigid for a moment, intense fear in her eyes.

"Do you know what you have done?" she whispered, miserably.

"Usurped the throne," he replied, assuming an ease and complacence he did not feel. Truly he was guilty of unprecedented presumption.

"You have desecrated—desecrated! Do you

hear?" she went on, paying no attention to his remark.

"Peccavi. Ah, Your Highness, I delight in my sin. For once I am a power; I speak from the throne. You will not have me abdicate in the zenith of my glory? Be kind, most gracious one. Besides, did you not once cry because your uncle refused to sit with you? Had he been the possessor of a dangerous wound, as I am, and had he found himself so weak that he could stand no longer, I am sure he would have done as I have—sat down in preference to falling limp at your feet. You do not know how badly I am wounded," he pleaded, with the subtlest double meaning.

"Why should you wound me?" she asked, plaintively. "You have no right to treat the throne I occupy as a subject for pranks and indignities. I did not believe you could be so—forgetful." There was a proud and pitiful resentment in her voice that brought him to his senses at once. He had defiled her throne. In shame and humiliation, he cried:

"I am a fool—an ingrate. You have been too gentle with me. For this despicable act of mine I cannot ask pardon, and it would be beneath you to grant it. I have hurt you, and I can never atone. I forgot how sacred is your throne. Let me depart in disgrace." He stood erect, as if to forsake the throne he had stained, but she, swayed by a com-

plete reversal of feeling, timidly, pleadingly, touched his arm.

"Stay! It is my throne, after all. I shall divide it, as well as the sin, with you. Sit down again, I beg of you. For a brief spell I would rule beside a man who is fit to be a King, but who is a desecrator. There can be no harm, and no one shall be the wiser for this sentimental departure from royal custom. We are children, anyhow—mere children."

With an exclamation of delight, he resumed his position beside her. His hand trembled as he took up hers to carry it to his lips. "We are children—playing with fire," he murmured, this ingrate, this fool!

She allowed her hand to lie limply in his, her head sinking to the back of the chair. When her hand was near his feverish lips, cool and white and trusting, he checked the upward progress. Slowly he raised his eyes to study her face, finding that hers were closed, the semblance of a smile touching her lips, as if they were in a happy dream.

The lips! The lips! The lips! The madness of love rushed into his heart; the expectant hand was forgotten; his every hope and every desire measured themselves against his discretion as he looked upon the tempting face. Could he kiss those lips but once his life would be complete.

With a start, she opened her eyes, doubtless at the command of the masterful ones above. The eyes

of blue met the eyes of gray in a short, sharp struggle, and the blue went down in surrender. His lips triumphed slowly, drawing closer and closer, as if restrained and impelled by the same emotion—arrogant love.

"Open your eyes, darling," he whispered, and she obeyed. Then their lips met—her first kiss of love!

She trembled from head to foot, perfectly powerless beneath the spell. Again he kissed a Princess on her throne. At this second kiss her eyes grew wide with terror, and she sprang from his side, standing before him like one bereft of reason.

"Oh, my God! What have you done?" she wailed. He staggered to his feet, dizzy with joy.

"Ha!" cried a gruff voice from the doorway, and the guilty ones whirled to look upon the witness to their blissful crime. Inside the curtains, with carbine leveled at the head of the American, stood Allode, the guard, his face distorted by rage. The Princess screamed and leaped between Lorry and the threatening carbine.

"Allode!" she cried, in frantic terror.

He angrily cried out something in his native tongue and she breathlessly, imploringly replied. Lorry did not understand their words, but he knew that she had saved him from death at the hand of her loyal, erring guard. Allode lowered his gun, bowed low and turned his back upon the throne.

"He—he would have killed you," she said, tremu-

lously, her face the picture of combined agony and relief. She remembered the blighting kisses and the averted disaster.

"You—what did you say to him?" he asked.

"I—I—oh, I will not tell you," she cried.

"I beg of you!"

"I told him that he was to—was to put down his gun."

"I know that, but why?" he persisted.

"I—Ach, to save you, stupid!"

"How did you explain the—the——" He hesitated, generously.

"I told him that I had not been—that I had not been——"

"Say it!"

"That I had not been—offended!" she gasped, standing stiff and straight, with eyes glued upon the obedient guard.

"You were not?" he rapturously cried.

"I said it only to save your life!" she cried, turning fiercely upon him. "I shall never forgive you! Never! You must go—you must leave here at once! Do you hear? I cannot have you near me now—I cannot see you again. Ach, God! What have I given you the right to say of me?"

"Stop! It is as sacred as——"

"Yes, yes—I understand! I trust you, but you must go! Find some excuse to give your friend

and go to-day! Go now!" she cried, intensely, first putting her hands to her temples, then to her eyes.

Without waiting to hear his remonstrance, if indeed he had the power to utter one, she glided swiftly toward the curtains, allowing him to follow at his will. Dazed and crushed at the sudden end to everything, he dragged his footsteps after. At the door she spoke in low, imperative tones to the motionless Allode, who dropped to his knees and muttered a reverential response. As Lorry passed beneath the hand that held the curtain aside, he glanced at the face of the man who had been witness to their weakness. He was looking straight ahead, and, from his expression, it could not have been detected that he knew there was a man on earth save himself. In the hall, she turned to him, her face cold and pale.

"I have faithful guards about me now. Allode has said he did not see you in the throne room. He will die before he will say otherwise," she said, her lips trembling with shame.

"By your command?"

"By my request. I do not command my men to lie."

Side by side they passed down the quiet hall, silent, thoughtful, the strain of death upon their hearts.

"I shall obey the only command you have given, then. This day I leave the castle. You will let

me come again—to see you? There can be no harm——"

"No! You must leave Graustark at once!" she interrupted, the tones low.

"I refuse to go! I shall remain in Edelweiss, near you, just so long as I feel that I may be of service to you."

"I cannot drive you out as I would a thief," she said, pointedly.

At the top of the broad staircase he held out his hand and murmured:

"Good-bye, Your Highness!"

"Good-bye," she said, simply, placing her hand in his after a moment's hesitation. Then she left him.

An hour later the two Americans, one strangely subdued, the other curious, excited and impatient, stood before the castle waiting for the carriage. Count Halfont was with them, begging them to remain, as he could see no reason for the sudden leave-taking. Lorry assured him that they had trespassed long enough on the court's hospitality, and that he would feel much more comfortable at the hotel. Anguish looked narrowly at his friend's face, but said nothing. He was beginning to understand.

"Let us walk to the gates. The Count will oblige us by instructing the coachman to follow," said Lorry, eager to be off.

"Allow me to join you in the walk, gentlemen,"

said Count Caspar, immediately instructing a lackey to send the carriage after them. He and Lorry walked on together, Anguish lingering behind, having caught sight of the Countess Dagmar. That charming and unconventional piece of nobility promptly followed the Prime Minister's example and escorted the remaining guest to the gate.

Far down on the walk Lorry turned for a last glance at the castle from which love had banished him. Yetive was standing on the balcony, looking not at the monastery but at the exile.

She remained there long after the carriage had passed her gates, bearing the Americans swiftly over the white Castle Avenue, and there were tears in her eyes.

XV

THE BETROTHAL

Harry Anguish was a discreet, forbearing fellow. He did not demand a full explanation of his friend. There was enough natural wit in his merry head to see that in connection with their departure there was something that would not admit of discussion, even by confidential friends. He shrewdly formed his own conclusions and held his peace. Nor did he betray surprise when Lorry informed him, in answer to a question, that he intended to remain in Edelweiss for some time, adding that he could not expect him to do likewise if he preferred to return to Paris. But Mr. Anguish preferred to remain in Edelweiss. Had not the Countess Dagmar told him she would always be happy to see him at the castle, and had he any reason to renounce its walls? And so it was that they tarried together.

Lorry loitered aimlessly, moodily about the town, spending gloomy days and wretched nights. He reasoned that it were wisdom to fly, but a force stronger than reason held him in Edelweiss. He ventured several times to the castle wall, but turned back resolutely. There was hope in his breast that she might send for him; there was, at least, the possibility of seeing her should she ride through the

streets. Anguish, on the other hand, visited the castle daily. He spent hours with the pretty Countess, undismayed by the noble moths that fluttered about her flame, and he was ever persistent, light-hearted and gay. He brought to Lorry's ears all that he could learn of the Princess. Several times he had seen her and had spoken with her. She inquired casually after the health of his friend, but nothing more. From the Countess he ascertained that Her Highness was sleeping soundly, eating heartily and apparently enjoying the best of spirits—information decidedly irritating to the one who received it second-hand.

They had been at the hotel for over a week when one afternoon Anguish rushed into the room, out of breath and scarcely able to control his excitement.

"What's up?" cried Lorry. "Has the Countess sacked you?"

"Not on your coin! But something is up, and I am its discoverer. You remember what you said about suspecting Prince Gabriel of being the chief rascal in the abduction job? Well, my boy, I am now willing to stake my life that he is the man." The news-bearer sat down on the edge of the bed and drew the first long breath he had had in a long time.

"Why do you think so?" demanded the other, all interest.

"Heard him talking just now. I didn't know who the fellow was at first, but he was talking to some strange-looking soldiers as I passed. As soon as I heard his voice I knew he was Michael. There isn't any question about it, Lorry. I am positive. He didn't observe me, but I suppose by this time he has learned that his little job was frustrated by two Americans who heard the plot near the castle gates. He has nerve to come here, hasn't he?"

"If he is guilty, yes. Still, he may feel secure because he is a powerful Prince and able to resent any accusation with a show of force. Where is he now?"

"I left him there. Come on! We'll go down and you can see for yourself."

They hurried to the corridor, which was swarming with men in strange uniforms. There were a few Graustark officers, but the majority of the buzzing conversationalists were dressed in a rich gray uniform.

"Who are these strangers?" asked Lorry.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. Prince Lorenz is also here, and these gray fellows are a part of his retinue. Lorenz has gone on to the castle. What's the matter?" Lorry had turned pale and was reaching for the wall with unsteady hand.

"He has come for his answer," he said, slowly, painfully.

"That's right! I hadn't thought of that. I hope

me turns him down. But there's Gabriel over yonder. See those three fellows in blue? The middle one is the Prince."

Near the door leading to the piazza stood several men, gray and blue. The man designated as Gabriel was in the center, talking gaily and somewhat loudly, puffing at a cigarette between sentences. He was not tall, but he was strongly and compactly built. His hair and cropped beard were as black as coal, his eyes wide, black and lined. It was a pleasure-worn face, and Lorry shuddered as he thought of the Princess in the power of this evil-looking wretch. They leisurely made their way to a spot near the talkers. There was no mistaking the voice. Prince Gabriel and Michael were one and the same, beyond all doubt. But how to prove it to the satisfaction of others? Skepticism would follow any attempt to proclaim the Prince guilty because his voice sounded like that of the chief conspirator. In a matter where whole nations were concerned the gravest importance would be attached to the accusation of a ruler. Satisfying themselves as to the identity of that peculiar voice, the friends passed through to the piazza.

"What's to be done?" asked Anguish, boiling over with excitement.

"We must go to Baron Dangloss, tell him of our positive discovery, and then consult Count Halfont."

"And Her Royal Highness, of course."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Lorry, flicking the ashes from his cigar with a finger that was not steady. He was serving the Princess again.

They hurried to the Tower, and were soon in the presence of the fierce little Chief of Police. Lorry spent many hours with Dangloss of late, and they had become friends. His grim old face blanched perceptibly as he heard the assertions of the young men. He shook his head despairingly.

"It may be as you say, gentlemen, but I am afraid we can do nothing. To charge a Prince with such a crime on such evidence would be madness. I am of your belief, however. Prince Gabriel is the man I have suspected. Now I am convinced. Before we can do anything in such a grave matter it will be necessary to consult the Princess and her Ministers. In case we conclude to accuse the Prince of Dawsbergen, it must be after careful and judicious thought. There are many things to consider, gentlemen. For my part, I would be overjoyed to seize the villain and to serve him as we did his tools, but my hands are tied, you see. I would suggest that you go at once to the Princess and Count Halfont tell them of your suspicions——"

"Not suspicions, my lord,—facts," interrupted Anguish.

"Well, then, facts, and ascertain how they feel about taking up a proposition that may mean war.

May I ask you to come at once to me with their answer. It is possible that they will call for a consultation with the Ministers, nobles and high officers. Still, I fear they will be unwilling to risk much on the rather flimsy proof you can give. Gabriel is powerful, and we do not seek war with him. There is another foe for whom we are quietly whetting our swords." The significant remark caused both listeners to prick up their ears. But he disappointed their curiosity, and they were left to speculate as to whom the other foe might be. Did he mean that Graustark was secretly, slyly making ready to resist, treaty or no treaty?

It required prolonged urging on the part of Anguish to persuade Lorry to accompany him to the castle, but, when once determined to go before the Princess with their tale, he was eager, impatient to cross the distance that lay between the hotel and the forbidden grounds. They walked rapidly down Castle Avenue and were soon at the gates. The guard knew them, and they were admitted without a word. As they hurried through the park, they saw many strange men in gray, gaudy uniforms, and it occurred to Lorry that their visit, no matter how great its importance, was ill-timed. Prince Lorenz was holding the center of the stage.

Anguish, with his customary impulsiveness, overruled Lorry's objections, and they proceeded toward

the entrance. The guards of the Princess saluted profoundly, while the minions of Lorenz stared with ill-bred wonder upon these two tall men from another world. It could be seen that the castle was astir with excitement, subdued and pregnant with thriving hopes and fears. The nobility of Graustark was there; the visitors of Axphain were being entertained.

At the castle doors the two met their first obstacle, but they anticipated its presence. Two guards halted them peremptorily.

"We must see Her Royal Highness," said Anguish, but the men could not understand him. They stoically stood their ground, shaking their heads.

"Let us find some one who can understand us," advised Lorry, and in a few moments they presented themselves before the guards, accompanied by a young nobleman with whom they had acquaintance. He succeeded in advancing them to the reception hall inside the doors and found for them a servant who would carry a message to the Princess if it were possible to gain her presence. The nobleman doubted very much, however, if the missive hastily written by Lorry could find its way to her, as she had never been so occupied as now.

Lorry, in his brief note, prayed for a short audience for himself and Mr. Anguish, requesting that Count Halfont be present. He informed her that his mission was of the most imperative nature and

that it related to a discovery made concerning the Prince who had tried to abduct her. In conclusion, he wrote that Baron Dangloss had required him to lay certain facts before her and that he had come with no intention to annoy her.

While they sat in the waiting-room they saw, through the glass doors, dozens of richly attired men and women in the hall beyond. They were conversing animatedly, Graustark men and women with dejected faces, Axphainians with exultation glowing in every glance. Lorry's heart sank within him. It seemed hours before the servant returned to bid them follow him. Then his blood leaped madly through veins that had been chilled and lifeless. He was to see her again!

Their guide conducted them to a small ante-room, where he left them. A few moments later the door opened and there swept quickly into the room—the Countess Dagmar, not the Princess. Her face was drawn with the trouble and sorrow she was trying so hard to conceal. Both men were on their feet in an instant, advancing to meet her.

"The Princess? Is she ill?" demanded Lorry.

"Not ill, but mad, I fear," answered she, giving a hand to each. "Mr. Lorry, she bids me say to you that she cannot see you. She appreciates the importance of your mission and thanks you for the interest you have taken. Also, she authorizes me to assure

you that nothing can be done at present regarding the business on which you come."

"She refuses to see us," said he, slowly, his face whiter than ever.

"Nay; she *begs* that you will excuse her. Her Highness is sorely worn and distressed to-day, and I fear cannot endure all that is happening. She is apparently calm and composed, but I, who know her so well, can see the strain beneath."

"Surely she must see the urgency of quick action in this matter of ours," cried Anguish, half angrily. "We are not dogs to be kicked out of the castle. We have a right to be treated fairly——"

"We cannot censure the Princess, Harry," said Lorry, calmly. "We have come because we would befriend her, and she sees fit to reject our good offices. There is but one thing left for us to do—depart as we came."

"But I don't like it a little bit," growled the other.

"If you only knew, Mr. Anguish, you would not be so harsh and unjust," remonstrated the lady warmly. Turning to Lorry, she said: "She asked me to hand you this and bid you retain it as a token of her undying esteem."

She handed him a small, exquisite miniature of the Princess, framed in gold inlaid with rubies. He took it dumbly in his fingers, but dared not look at the portrait it contained. With what might have

seemed disrespect, he dropped the treasure into his coat pocket.

"Tell her I shall always retain it as a token of her—esteem," he said. "And now may I ask whether she handed my note to her uncle, the Count?"

The Countess blushed in a most unaccountable manner.

"Not while I was with her," she said, recovering the presence of mind she apparently had lost.

"She destroyed it, I presume," said he, laughing harshly.

"I saw her place it in her bosom, sir, and with the right hand," cried the Countess, as if betraying a State secret.

"In her—you are telling me the truth?" cried he, his face lighting up.

"Now, see here, Lorry, don't begin to question the Countess's word. I won't stand for that," interposed Anguish, good-humoredly.

"I should be more than base to say falsely that she had done anything so absurd," said the Countess, indignantly.

"Where is she now?" asked Lorry.

"In her boudoir. The Prince Lorenz is with her—alone."

"What!" he cried, jealousy darting into his existence. He had never known jealousy before.

"They are betrothed," said she, with an effort.

There was a dead silence, broken by Lorry's deep groan as he turned and walked blindly to the opposite side of the room. He stopped in front of a huge painting and stared at it, but did not see a line or a tint.

"You don't mean to say she has accepted?" half whispered Anguish.

"Nothing less."

"Thank God, you are only a Countess," he said, tenderly.

"Why—why—what difference can it make—I mean, why do you say that?" she stammered, crimson to her hair.

"Because you won't have to sell yourself at a sacrifice," he said, foolishly. Lorry came back to them at this juncture, outwardly calm and deliberate.

"Tell us about it, pray. We had guessed as much."

"Out there are his people,—the wretches!" she cried, vindictively, her pretty face in a helpless frown. "To-day was the day, you know, on which he was to have his answer. He came and knelt in the audience chamber. All Graustark had implored her to refuse the hated offer, but she bade him rise, and there, before us all, promised to become his bride.

"The greatest sorrow Graustark has ever known grows out of that decision. She is determined to save for us what her father's folly lost. To do this,

she becomes the bride of a vile wretch, a man who soils her pure nature when he thinks of her. Oh, we sought to dissuade her,—we begged, we entreated, but without avail. She will not sacrifice one foot of Graustark to save herself. See the triumphant smiles on their faces—the brutes!" She pointed maliciously to the chattering visitors in the hall. "Already they think the castle is theirs. The union of Graustark and Axphain! Just what they most desired, but we could not make her see it so."

"Is the day set?" asked Lorry, bravely, after a moment's silent inspection of the dark-browed victors.

"Yes, and there is to be no delay. The marriage contract has already been signed. The date is November 20th, the day on which we are to account to Bolarez for our war debt. The old Prince's wedding gift to Graustark is to be a document favoring us with a ten years' extension," she said, scornfully.

"And where is she to live?"

"Here, of course. She is Graustark's ruler, and here she insists on abiding. Just contemplate our court! Over-run with those Axphain dogs! Ah, she has wounded Graustark more than she has helped her."

There was nothing more to be said or done, so, after a few moments, the Americans took their departure. The Countess bade them farewell, saying that she must return to the Princess.

"I'll see you to-morrow," said Anguish, with rare assurance and the air of an old and indispensable friend.

"And you, Mr. Lorry?" she said, curiously.

"I am very much occupied," he mumbled.

"You do wrong in seeking to deceive me," she whispered, as Anguish passed through the door ahead of them. "I know why you do not come."

"Has she told you?"

"I have guessed. Would that it could have been you and not the other."

"One cannot be a man and a Prince at the same time, I fancy," he said, bitterly.

"Nor can one be a Princess and a woman."

Lorry recalled the conversation in the sick-room two weeks before, and smiled ironically. The friendly girl left them at the door and they passed out of the castle.

"I shall leave Edelweiss to-morrow," said one, more to himself than to his companion, as they crossed the parade. The other gave a start and did not look pleased. Then he instinctively glanced toward the castle.

"The Princess is at her window," he cried, clutching Lorry's arm and pointing back. But the other refused to turn, walking on blindly.

"You ought not to have acted like that, Gren," said Anguish, a few moments later. "She saw me call your attention to her, and she saw you refuse to look back. I don't think that you should have

hurt her." Lorry did not respond, and there was no word between them until they were outside the castle gates.

"You may leave to-morrow, Lorry, if you like, but I'm going to stay a while," said Harry, a trifle confusedly.

"Haven't you had enough of the place?"

"I don't care a whoop for the place. You see, it's this way: I'm just as hard hit as you, and it is not a Princess that I have to contend with."

"You mean that you are in love with the Countess?"

"Emphatically."

"I'm sorry for you."

"Think she'll turn me down?"

"Unless you buy a title from one of these miserable Counts or Dukes."

"Oh, I'm not so sure about that. These Counts and Dukes come over and marry our American girls. I don't see why I can't step in and pick out a nice little Countess if I want to."

"She is not as avaricious as the Counts and Dukes, I'll wager She cares nothing for your money."

"Well, she's as poor as a church mouse," said the other, doggedly.

"The Countess poor? How do you know?"

"I asked her one day and she told me all about it," said Anguish.

XVI

A CLASH AND ITS RESULT

"I feel like spending the rest of my days in that monastery up there," said Lorry, after dinner that evening. They were strolling about the town. One was determined to leave the city, the other firm in his resolve to stay. The latter won the day when he shrewdly, if explosively, reminded the former that it was their duty as men to stay and protect the Princess from the machinations of Gabriel, that knave of purgatory. Lorry, at last recognizing the hopelessness of his suit, was ready to throw down his arms and abandon the field to superior odds. His presumption in aspiring for the hand of a Princess began to touch his sense of humor, and he laughed, not very merrily, it is true, but long and loudly, at his folly. At first he cursed the world and every one in it, giving up in despair, but later he cursed only himself. Yet, as he despaired and scoffed, he felt within himself the ever-present hope that luck might turn the tide of battle.

This puny ray grew perceptibly when Anguish brought him to feel that she needed his protection from the man who had once sought to despoil and who might reasonably be expected to persevere. He

agreed to linger in Edelweiss, knowing that each day would add pain to the torture he was already suffering, his sole object being, he convinced himself, to frustrate Gabriel's evil plans.

Returning late in the evening from their stroll, they entered a café celebrated in Edelweiss. In all his life, Lorry had never known the loneliness that makes death welcome. To-night he felt that he could not live, so maddening was the certainty that he could never regain joy. His heart bled with the longing to be near her who dwelt inside those castle walls. He scoffed and grieved, but grieved the more.

The café was crowded with men and women. In a far corner sat a party of Axphain nobles, their Prince, a most democratic fellow, at the head of a long table. There were songs, jests and boisterous laughter. The celebration grew wilder, and Lorry and Anguish crossed the room, and, taking seats at a table, ordered wine and cigars, both eager for a closer view of the Prince. How Lorry loathed him!

Lorenz was a good-looking young fellow, little more than a boy. His smooth face was flushed, and there was about him an air of dissipation that suggested depravity in its advanced stage. The face that might have been handsome was the reflection of a *roué,* dashing, devilish. He was fair-haired and tall, taller than his companions by half a head. With

reckless abandon, he drank and sang and jested, arrogant in his flighty merriment. His cohorts were not far behind him in riotous wit.

At length one of the revelers, speaking in German, called on Lorenz for a toast to the Princess Yetive, his promised bride. Without a moment's hesitation the Prince sprang to his feet, held his glass aloft, and cried:

"Here's to the fairest of the fair, sweet Yetive, so hard to win, too good to lose. She loves me, God bless her heart! And I love her, God bless my heart, too! For each kiss from her wondrous lips I shall credit myself with oue thousand gavvos. That is the price of a kiss."

"I'll give two thousand!" roared one of the nobles, and there was a laugh in which the Prince joined.

"Nay! I'll not sell them now. In after years, when she has grown old and her lips are parched and dry from the sippings I have had, I'll sell them all at a bargain. Alas, she has not yet kissed me!"

Lorry's heart bounded with joy, though his hands were clenched in rage.

"She will kiss me to-morrow. To-morrow I shall taste what no other man has touched, what all men have coveted. And I'll be generous, gentlemen. She is so fair that your foul mouths would blight with but one caress upon her tender lips, and yet you shall not be deprived of bliss. I shall kiss her thrice for each of you. Let me count: thrice eleven is thirty-

three. Aye, thirty-three of my kisses shall be wasted for the sake of my friends, lucky dogs! Drink to my Princess!"

"Bravo!" cried the others, and the glasses were raised to lip.

A chair was overturned. The form of a man landed suddenly at the side of the Prince and a rough hand dashed the glass from his fingers, the contents flying over his immaculate English evening dress.

"Don't you dare drink to that toast!" cried a voice in his astonished ear, a voice speaking in excited German. He whirled and saw a scowling face beside his own, a pair of gray eyes that flashed fire.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, anger replacing amazement. The other members of his party stood as if spellbound.

"I mean that you speak of the Princess of Graustark. Do you understand that, you miserable cur?"

"Oh!" screamed the Prince, convulsed with rage, starting back and instinctively reaching for the sword he did not carry. "You shall pay for this! I will teach you to interfere——"

"I'll insult you more decidedly, just to avoid misapprehension," snarled Lorry, swinging his big fist squarely upon the mouth of the Prince. His Royal Highness landed under a table ten feet away.

Instantly the café was in an uproar. The stupe-

fied Axphainians regained their senses and a general assault was made upon the hot-headed American. He knocked another down, Harry Anguish coming to his assistance with several savage blows, after which the Graustark spectators and the waiters interfered. It was all over in an instant, yet a sensation that would live in the gossip of generations had been created. A Prince of the realm had been brutally assaulted! Holding his jaw, Lorenz picked himself from the floor, several of his friends running to his aid. There was blood on his lips and chin; it trickled to his shirt front. For some moments he stood panting, glaring at Lorry's mocking face.

"I am Lorenz of Axphain, sir," he said at last, his voice quivering with suppressed anger.

"It shall be a pleasure to kill you, Lorenz," observed his adversary, displaying his ignorance of lese-majesté.

Anguish, pale and very much concerned, dragged him away, the Prince leaving the café ahead of them, followed by his chattering, cursing companions. Prince Gabriel was standing near the door as they passed out. He looked at the Americans sharply, and Anguish detected something like triumphant joy in his eyes.

"Good Lord, Lorry; this means a duel! Don't you know that?" cried he, as they started upstairs.

"Of course, I do. And I'm going to kill that

villain, too," exclaimed Lorry, loud enough to be heard from one end of the room to the other.

"This is horrible, horrible! Let me square it up some way if——" began the alarmed Anguish.

"Square it up! Look here, Harry Anguish, I am the one who will do the squaring. If he wants a duel he can have it any old time and in any style he desires."

"He may kill you!"

"Not while a just God rules over our destinies. I'll take my chances with pistols, and now let me tell you one thing, my boy; he'll never live to touch his lips to hers, nor will there be a royal wedding. She cannot marry a dead man." He was beside himself with excitement, and it was fully half an hour before Anguish could bring him to a sensible discussion of the affair. Gradually he became cool, and, the fever once gone, he did not lose his head again.

"Choose pistols at ten paces and at eight to-morrow," he said, nonchalantly, as a rap at the door of their apartment announced the arrival of the Prince's friend.

Anguish admitted two well-dressed, black-bearded men, both of whom had sat at the Prince's table in the café. They introduced themselves as the Duke of Mizrox and Colonel Attobawn. Their visit was brief, formal and conclusive.

"We understand that you are persons of rank in

your own America?" said the Duke of Mizrox, after a few moments.

"We are sons of business men," responded Mr. Anguish.

"Oh, well, I hardly know. But His Highness is very willing to waive his rank, and to grant you a meeting."

"I'm delighted by His Highness's condescension, which I perfectly understand," observed Mr. Anguish. "Now, what have we to settle, gentlemen?"

"The detail of weapons."

When Anguish announced that his principal chose pistols, a strange gleam crept into the eyes of the Axphainians, and they seemed satisfied. Colonel Attobawn acted as interpreter during this short but very important interview which was carried on in the Axphain language. Lorry sat on the window-sill, steadfastly gazing into the night. The visitors departed soon, and it was understood that Prince Lorenz would condescend to meet Mr. Lorry at eight o'clock on the next morning in the valley beyond the castle, two miles from town. There was no law prohibiting duels in Graustark.

"Well, you're in for it, old man," said Anguish, gloomily, his chin in his hands as he fastened melancholy eyes upon his friend.

"Don't worry about me, Harry. There's only one way for this thing to end. His Royal Highness is doomed." Lorry spoke with the earnestness and

conviction of one who is permitted to see into the future.

Calmly, he prepared to write some letters, not to say farewell, but to explain to certain persons the cause of the duel and to say that he gloried in the good fortune which had presented itself. One of these letters was addressed to his mother, another to the father of Prince Lorenz, and the last to the Princess of Graustark. To the latter he wrote much that did not appear in the epistles directed to the others. Anguish had been in his room more than an hour, and had frequently called to his friend and begged him to secure what rest he could in order that their nerves might be steady in the morning. But it was not until after midnight that the duelist sealed the envelopes, directed them and knocked at his second's door to say:

"I shall entrust these letters to you, Harry. You must see that they start on their way to-morrow."

Then he went to bed and to sleep.

At six his second, who had slept but little, called him. They dressed hurriedly and prepared for the ride to the valley. Their own new English bulldog revolvers were to serve as weapons in the coming combat, and a carriage was to be in waiting for them in a side street at seven o'clock.

Before leaving their room they heard evidences of a commotion in the hotel, and were apprehensive lest the inmates had learned of the duel and were making

ready to follow the fighters to the appointed spot. There was a confusion of voices, the sound of rushing feet, the banging of doors, the noise increasing as the two men stepped into the open hall. They were amazed to see half-dressed men and women standing or running about the halls, intense excitement in their faces and in their actions. White uniformed policemen were flocking into the corridors; soldiers, coatless and hatless, fresh from their beds, came dashing upon the scene. There were excited cries, angry shouts and, more mystifying than all, horrified looks and whispers.

"What has happened?" asked Lorry, stopping near the door.

"It can't be a fire. Look! The door to that room down there seems to be the center of attraction. Hold on! Don't go over there, Lorry. There may be something to unnerve you, and that must not happen now. Let us go down this stairway—it leads to a side entrance, I think." They were half way down the stairs when the thunder of rushing feet in the hall above came to their ears, causing them to hesitate between curiosity and good judgment. "They are coming this way."

"Hear them howl! What the devil can be the cause of all this rumpus?" cried the other.

At that instant half a dozen police guards appeared at the head of the stairs. Upon seeing the Americans, they stopped and turned as if to oppose

a foe approaching from the opposite direction. Baron Dangloss separated himself from the white coats above and called to the men below. In alarm, they started for the street door. He was with them in an instant, his usually red face changing from white to purple, his anxious eyes darting first toward the group above and then toward the bewildered Americans.

"What's the matter?" demanded Lorry.

"There! See!" cried Dangloss, and even as he spoke a conflict began at the head of the stairs, the police, augmented by a few soldiers, struggling against a howling, enraged mass of Axphainians. Dangloss dragged his reluctant charges through a small door, and they found themselves in the baggage-room of the hotel. Despite their queries, he offered no explanation, but rushed them along, passing out of the opposite door, down a short stairway and into a side street. A half dozen police-guards were awaiting them, and before they could catch the faintest idea of what it all meant, they were running with the officers through an alley, as if pursued by demons.

"Now, what in thunder does this mean?" panted Lorry, attempting to slacken the pace. He and Anguish were just beginning to regain their senses.

"Do not stop! Do not stop!" wheezed Dangloss. "You must get to a place of safety. We cannot pre-

vent something dreadful happening if you are caught!"

"If we are caught!" cried Anguish. "Why, what have we done?"

"Unhand me, Baron Dangloss! This is an outrage!" shouted Lorry.

"For God's sake, be calm! We are befriending you. When we reach the Tower, where you will be safe, I shall explain," gasped the panting Chief of Police. A few moments later they were inside the prison gates, angry, impatient, fatigued.

"Is this a plan to prevent the duel?" demanded Lorry, turning upon the chief, who had dropped limply into a chair and was moping his brow. When he could find his breath enough to answer, Dangloss did so, and he might as well have thrown a bombshell at their feet.

"There'll be no duel. Prince Lorenz is dead!"

"Dead!" gasped the others.

"Found dead in his bed, stabbed to the heart!" exclaimed the chief. "We have saved you from his friends, gentlemen, but I must say that you are still in a tight place."

He then related to them the whole story. Just before six o'clock Mizrox had gone to the Prince's room to prepare him for the duel. The door was closed but unlocked, as he found after repeated knockings. Lorenz was lying on the bed, undressed and covered with blood. The horrified Duke made

a hasty examination and found that he was dead. A dagger had been driven to his heart as he slept. The hotel was aroused, the police called, and the excitement was at its highest pitch when the two friends came from their room a few minutes after six.

"But what have we to do with this dreadful affair? Why are we rushed off here like criminals?" asked Lorry, a feeling of cruel gladness growing out of the knowledge that Lorenz was dead and that the Princess was freed from her compact.

"My friend," said Dangloss, slowly, "you are accused of the murder."

Lorry was too much stunned to be angry, too weak to protest. For some moments after the blow fell he and Anguish were speechless. Then came the protestations, the rage and the threats, through all of which Dangloss sat calmly. Finally he sought to quiet them, partially succeeding.

"Mr. Lorry, the evidence is very strong against you, but you shall not be unjustly treated. You are not a prisoner as yet. In Graustark a man who is accused of murder, and who was not seen by any one to commit the crime, cannot be legally arrested until an accuser shall go before the Princess, who is also High Priestess, and swear on his life that he knows the guilty man. The man who so accuses agrees to forfeit his own life in case the other is proved innocent. If you are to be charged with the

murder of the Prince, some one must go before the Princess and take oath—his life against yours. I am holding you here, sir, because it is the only place in which you are safe. Lorenz's friends would have torn you to pieces had we not found you first. You are not prisoners, and you may depart if you think it wise."

"But, my God, how can they accuse me? I knew nothing of the murder until I reached this place," cried Lorry, stopping short in his restless walk before the little Baron.

"So you say, but——"

"If you accuse me, damn you, I'll kill you!" whispered Lorry, holding himself tense. Anguish caught and held him.

"Be calm, sir," cautioned Dangloss. "I may have my views, but I am not willing to take oath before Her Royal Highness. Listen: You were heard to say you would kill him; you began the fight; you were the aggressor, and there is no one else on earth, it is said, who could have wished to murder him. The man who did the stabbing entered the room through the hall door and left by the same. There are drops of blood in the carpet, leading direct to your door. On your knob are the prints of bloody fingers where you—or some one else—placed his hand in opening the door. It was this discovery, made by me and my men, that fully convinced the enraged friends of the dead Prince that you were

guilty. When we opened the door you were gone. Then came the search, the fight at the head of the stairs, and the race to the prison. The reason I saved you from that mob should be plain to you. I love my Princess, and I do not forget that you risked your life—each of you—to protect her. I have done all that I can, gentlemen, to protect you in return. It means death to you if you fall into the hands of his followers just now. A few hours will cool them off, no doubt, but now—now it would be madness to face them. I know not what they have done to my men at the hotel!—perhaps butchered them."

There was anxiety in Dangloss's voice and there was honesty in his keen old eyes. His charges now saw the situation clearly and apologized warmly for the words they had uttered under the pressure of somewhat extenuating circumstances. They expressed a willingness to remain in the prison until the excitement abated or until some one swore his life against the supposed murderer. They were virtually prisoners, and they knew it well. Furthermore, they could see that Baron Dangloss believed Lorry guilty of the murder; protestation of innocence had been politely received and politely disregarded.

"Do you expect one of his friends to take the oath?" asked Lorry.

"Yes; it is sure to come."

"But you will not do so yourself?"

"No."

"I thank you, captain, for I see that you believe me guilty."

"I do not say you are guilty, remember, but I will say that if you did murder Prince Lorenz you have made the people of Graustark rejoice from the bottoms of their hearts, and you will be eulogized from one end of the land to the other."

"Hanged and eulogized," said Lorry, grimly.

XVI

IN THE TOWER

The two captives who were not prisoners were so dazed by the unexpected events of the morning that they did not realize the vast seriousness of the situation for hours. Then it dawned upon them that appearances were really against them, and that they were alone in a land far beyond the reach of help from home. One circumstance puzzled them with its damning mystery:—how came the blood stains upon the door-knob? Dangloss courteously discussed this strange and unfortunate feature with them, but with ill-concealed skepticism. It was evident that his mind was clear in regard to the whole affair.

Anguish was of the opinion that the real murderer had stained the knob intentionally, aiming to cast suspicion on the man who had been challenged. The assassin had an object in leaving those convicting finger-marks where they would do the most damage. He either desired the arrest and death of the American or hoped that his own guilt might escape attention through the misleading evidence. Lorry held,

from his deductions, that the crime had been committed by a fanatic who loved his sovereign too devotedly to see her wedded to Lorenz. Then why should he wantonly cast guilt upon the man who had been her protector, objected Dangloss.

The police guards came in from the hotel about ten o'clock, bearing marks of an ugly conflict with the Axphainians. They reported that the avengers had been quelled for the time being, but that a deputation had already started for the castle to lay the matter before the Princess. Officers had searched the rooms of the Americans for blood stains, but had found no sign of them.

"Did you find bloody water in which hands had been washed?" asked Anguish.

"No," responded one of the guards. "There was nothing to be found in the bowls and jars except soapy water. There is not a blood stain in the room, Captain."

"That shakes your theory a little, eh?" cried Anguish, triumphantly. "Examine Mr. Lorry's hands and see if there is blood upon them." Lorry's hands were white and uncontaminated. Dangloss wore a pucker on his brow.

Shortly afterward a crowd of Axphain men came to the prison gates and demanded the person of Grenfall Lorry, departing after an ugly show of rage. Curious Edelweiss citizens stood afar off, watching the walls and windows eagerly.

"This may cost Edelweiss a great deal of trouble, gentlemen, but there is more happiness here this morning than the city has known in months. Everybody believes you killed him, Mr. Lorry, but they all love you for the deed," said Dangloss, returning at noon from a visit to the hotel and a ride through the streets. "The Prince's friends have been at the castle since nine o'clock, and I am of the opinion that they are having a hard time with the High Priestess."

"God bless her!" cried Lorry.

"The town is crazy with excitement. Messengers have been sent to old Prince Bolaroz to inform him of the murder and to urge him to hasten hither, where he may fully enjoy the vengeance that is to be wreaked upon his son's slayer. I have not seen a wilder time in Edelweiss since the close of the siege, fifteen years ago. By my soul, you are in a bad box, sir. They are lurking in every part of town to kill you if you attempt to leave the Tower before the Princess signs an order to restrain you legally. Your life, outside these walls, would not be worth a snap of the fingers."

Captain Quinnox, of the Princess's bodyguard, accompanied by half a dozen of his men, rode up to the prison gates about two o'clock and was promptly admitted. The young captain was in sore distress.

"The Duke of Mizrox has sworn that you are the murderer, Mr. Lorry, and stakes his life," said he,

after greetings. "Her Highness has just placed in my hands an order for your arrest as the assassin of Prince Lorenz."

Lorry turned as pale as death. "You—you don't mean to say that she has signed a warrant—that she believes me guilty," he cried, aghast.

"She has signed the warrant, but very much against her inclination. Count Halfont informed me that she pleaded and argued with the Duke for hours, seeking to avert the act which is bound to give pain to all of us. He was obdurate, and threatened to carry complaint to Bolaroz, who would instantly demand satisfaction. As the Duke is willing to die if you are proved innocent, there was no other course left for her than to dictate and sign this royal decree. Captain Dangloss, I am instructed to give you these papers. One is the warrant for Mr. Lorry's arrest, the other orders you to assume charge of him and to place him in confinement until the day of trial."

While Quinnox was making this statement, the accused stood with bowed head and throbless heart. He did not see the captain's hand tremble as he passed the documents to Dangloss, nor did he hear the unhappy sigh that came from the latter's lips. Anguish, fiery and impulsive, was not to be subdued.

"Is there no warrant for my arrest?" he demanded.

"There is not. You are at liberty to go, sir," responded Quinnox.

"I'd like to know why there isn't. I'm just as guilty as Lorry."

"The Duke charges the crime to but one of you. Baron Dangloss, will you read the warrant?"

The old chief read the decree of the Princess slowly and impressively. It was as follows:

"Jacot, Duke of Mizrox, before his God and on his life, swears that Grenfall Lorry did foully, maliciously and designedly slay Lorenz, Prince of Axphain, on the 20th day of October, in the year of our Lord 189—, and in the city of Edelweiss, Graustark. It is therefore my decree that Grenfall Lorry be declared murderer of Lorenz, Prince of Axphain, until he be proved innocent, in which instance, his accuser, Jacot, Duke of Mizrox, shall forfeit his life, according to the law of this land providing penalty for false witness, and by which he, himself, has sworn to abide faithfully.

"Signed: Yetive."

There was silence for some moments, broken by the dreary tones of the accused.

"What chance have I to prove my innocence?" he asked. hopelessly.

"The same opportunity that he has to prove your guilt. The Duke must, according to our law, prove

you guilty beyond all doubt," spoke the young captain.

"When am I to be tried?"

"Here is my order from the Princess," said Dangloss, glancing over the other paper. "It says that I am to confine you securely and to produce you before the tribunal on the 26th day of October."

"A week! That is a long time," said Lorry. "May I have permission to see the signature affixed to those papers?" Dangloss handed them to him. He glanced at the name he loved, written by the hand he had kissed, now signing away his life, perhaps. A mist came over his eyes and a strange joy filled his soul. The hand that signed the name had trembled in doing so, had trembled pitifully. The heart had not guided the fingers. "I am your prisoner, Captain Dangloss. Do with me as you will," he said, simply.

"I regret that I am obliged to place you in a cell, sir, and under guard. Believe me, I am sorry this happened. I am your friend," said the old man, gloomily.

"And I," cried Quinnox.

"But what is to become of me?" cried poor Anguish, half in tears. "I won't leave you, Gren. It's an infernal outrage!"

"Be cool, Harry, and it will come out right. He has no proof, you know," said the other, wringing his friend's hand.

"But I'll have to stay here, too. If I go outside these walls, I'll be killed like a dog," protested Harry.

"You are to have a guard of six men while you are in Edelweiss, Mr. Anguish. Those are the instructions of the Princess. I do not believe the scoundrels—I mean the Axphain nobles—will molest you if you do not cross them. When you are ready to go to your hotel, I will accompany you."

Half an hour later Lorry was in a cell from which there could be no escape, while Anguish was riding toward the hotel, surrounded by Graustark soldiers. He had sworn to his friend that he would unearth the murderer if it lay within the power of man. Captain Dangloss heard the oath and smiled sadly.

At the castle there was depression and relief, grief and joy. The royal family, the nobility, even the servants, soldiers and attendants, rejoiced in the stroke that had saved the Princess from a fate worse than death. Her preserver's misfortune was deplored deeply; expressions of sympathy were whispered among them all, high and low. The Axphainians were detested—the Prince most of all—and the crime had come as a joy instead of a shock. There were, of course, serious complications for the future, involving ugly conditions that were bound to force themselves upon the land. The dead man's father would demand the life of his murderer. If not Lorry, who? Graustark would certainly be

asked to produce the man who killed the heir to the throne of Axphain, or to make reparation—bloody reparation, no doubt.

In the privacy of her room the stricken Princess collapsed from the effects of the ordeal. Her poor brain had striven in vain to invent means by which she might save the man she loved. She had surrendered to the inevitable because there was justice in the claims of the inexorable Duke and his vindictive friends. Against her will, she had issued the decree, but not, however, until she had learned that he was in prison and unable to fly the country. The hope that delay might aid him in escaping was rudely crushed when her uncle informed her of Lorry's whereabouts. She signed the decree as if in a dream, a nightmare, with trembling hand and broken heart. His death warrant! And yet, like all others, she believed him guilty. Guilty for her sake! And this was how she rewarded him.

Mizrox and his friends departed in triumph, revenge written on every face. She walked blindly, numbly, to her room, assisted by her uncle, the Count. Without observing her aunt or the Countess Dagmar, she staggered to the window and looked below. The Axphainians were crossing the parade ground jubilantly. Then came the clatter of a horse's hoof, and Captain Quinnox, with the fatal papers in his possession, galloped down the avenue.

She clutched the curtains distractedly, and, leaning far forward, cried from the open window:

"Quinnox! Quinnox! Come back! I forbid—I forbid! Destroy those papers! Quinnox!"

But Quinnox heard not the pitiful wail. He rode on, his dark face stamped with pity for the man whose arrest he was to make. Had he heard the cry from his sovereign, the papers would have been in her destroying grasp with the speed that comes only to the winged birds. Seeing him disappear down the avenue, she threw her hands to her head and sank back with a moan, fainting. Count Halfont caught her in his arms. It was nightfall before she was fully revived. The faithful young Countess clung to her caressingly, lovingly, uttering words of consolation until long after the shades of night had dropped. They were alone in the Princess's boudoir, seated together upon the divan, the tired head of the one resting wearily against the shoulder of the other. Gentle fingers toyed with the tawny tresses, and a soft voice lulled with its consoling promise of hope. Wide and dark and troubled were the eyes of the ruler of Graustark.

An attendant appeared and announced the arrival of one of the American gentlemen, who insisted on seeing Her Royal Highness. The card on the tray bore the name of Harry Anguish. At once the Princess was aflutter with eagerness and excitement.

"Anguish! Show him to this room quickly. Oh, Dagmar, he brings word from him! He comes from him! Why is he so slow? Ach, I cannot wait!"

Far from being slow, Anguish was exceedingly swift in approaching the room to which he feared admittance might be denied. He strode boldly, impetuously into the apartment, his feet muddy, his clothing splashed with rain, his appearance far from that of a gentleman.

"Tell me! What is it?" she cried, as he stopped in the center of the room and glared at her.

"I don't care whether you like it, and it doesn't matter if you are a Princess," he exploded, "there are a few things I'm going to say to you. First, I want to know what kind of a woman you are to throw into prison a man like—like—— Oh, it drives me crazy to think of it! I don't care if you are insulted. He's a friend of mine, and he is no more guilty than you are, and I want to know what you mean by ordering his arrest?"

Her lips parted as if to speak, her face grew deathly pale, her fingers clutched the edge of the divan. She stared at him piteously, unable to move, to speak. Then the blue eyes filled with tears, a sob came to her lips, and her tortured heart made a last, brave effort at defense.

"I—I—Mr. Anguish, you wrong me,—I—I——" She tried to whisper through the closed throat and

stiffened lips. Words failed her, but she pleaded with those wet, imploring eyes. His heart melted, his anger was swept away in a twinkling. He saw that he had wounded her most unjustly.

"You brute!" hissed the Countess, with flashing, indignant eyes, throwing her arms about the Princess and drawing her head to her breast.

"Forgive me," he cried, sinking to his knee before the Princess, shame and contrition in his face. "I have been half mad this whole day, and I have thought harshly of you. I now see that you are suffering more intensely than I. I love Lorry, and that is my only excuse. He is being foully wronged, Your Highness, foully wronged."

"I deserve your contempt, after all. Whether he be guilty or innocent, I should have refused to sign the decree. It is too late now. I have signed away something that is very dear to me,—his life. You are his friend and mine. Can you tell me what he thinks of me—what he says—how he feels?" She asked the triple question breathlessly.

"He believes you were forced into the act, and said as much to me. And how he feels, I can only ask how you would feel if you were in his place, innocent and yet almost sure of conviction. These friends of Axphain will resort to any subterfuge, now that one of their number has staked his life. Mark my word, some one will deliberately swear that he saw Grenfall Lorry strike the blow and that

will be as villainous a lie as man ever told. What I am here for, Your Highness, is to ask if that decree cannot be withdrawn."

"Alas, it cannot! I would gladly order his release if I could, but you can see what that would mean to us. A war, Mr. Anguish," she sighed, miserably.

"But you will not see an innocent man condemned?" cried he, again indignant.

"I have only your statement for that, sir, if you will pardon me. I hope, from the bottom of my heart, that he did not murder the Prince after being honorably challenged."

"He is no coward!" thundered Anguish, startling both women with his vehemence. "I say he did not kill the Prince, but I'll stake my life he would have done so had they met this morning. There's no use trying to have the decree rescinded, I see, so I'll take my departure. I don't blame you, Your Highness; it is your duty, of course. But it's pretty hard on Lorry, that's all."

"He may be able to clear himself," suggested the Countess, nervously.

"And he may not, so there you have it. What chance have two Americans over here with everybody against us?"

"Stop! You shall not say that! He shall have full justice, at any cost, and there is one here who is not against him," cried the Princess, with flashing eyes.

"I am aware that everybody admires him because he has done Graustark a service in ridding it of something obnoxious—a prospective husband. But that does not get him out of jail."

"You are unkind again," said the Princess, slowly. "I chose my husband, and you assume much when you intimate that I am glad because he was murdered."

"Do not be angry," cried the Countess, impatiently. "We all regret what has happened, and I, for one, hope that Mr. Lorry may escape from the Tower and laugh forevermore at his pursuers. If he could only dig his way out!"

The Princess shot a startled look toward the speaker as a new thought entered her weary brain; a short, involuntary gasp told that it had lodged and would grow. She laughed at the idea of an escape from the Tower, but as she laughed a tiny spot of red began to spread upon her cheek, and her eyes glistened strangely.

Anguish remained with them for half an hour. When he left the castle it was with a more hopeful feeling in his breast. In the Princess's bed-chamber late that night, two girls, in loose, silken gowns, sat before a low fire and talked of something that caused the Countess to tremble with excitement when first her pink-cheeked sovereign mentioned it in confidence.

XVIII

THE FLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT

Lorry's cell was as comfortable as a cell could be made through the efforts of a kindly jailer and a sympathetic Chief of Police. It was not located in the dungeon, but high in the tower, a little rock-bound room, with a single barred window far above the floor. There was a bed of iron upon which had been placed a clean mattress, and there was a little chair. The next day after his arrest a comfortable arm chair replaced the latter; a table, a lamp, some books, flowers, a bottle of wine and some fruit found their way to his lonely apartment—whoever may have sent them. Harry Anguish was admitted to the cell during the afternoon. He promptly and truthfully denied all interest in the donations, but smiled wisely.

He reported that most of the Axphain contingent was still in town; a portion had hurried home, carrying the news to the old Prince, instructed by the aggressive Mizrox to fetch him forthwith to Edelweiss, where his august presence was necessary before the twenty-sixth. Those who remained in the Graustark capital were quiet but still in a threatening

mood. The Princess, so Harry informed the prisoner, sent sincere expressions of sympathy and the hope that all would end well with him. Count Halfont, the Countess, Gaspon and many others had asked to be remembered. The prisoner smiled wearily and promised that they should not be forgotten in a week—which was as far as he expected his memory to extend.

Late in the evening, as he was lying on his bed, staring at the shadowy ceiling and puzzling his brain with most oppressive uncertainties, the rattle of keys in the lock announced the approach of visitors. The door swung open, and through the grate he saw Dangloss and Quinnox. The latter wore a long military rain coat and had just come in from a drenching downpour. Lorry's reverie had been so deep that he had not heard the thunder nor the howling of the winds. Springing to his feet, he advanced quickly to the grated door.

"Captain Quinnox brings a private message from the Princess," said the chief, the words scarcely more than whispered. It was plain that the message was important and of a secret nature. Quinnox looked up and down the corridor and stairway before thrusting the tiny note through the bars. It was grasped eagerly and trembling fingers broke the seal. Bending near the light, he read the lines, his vision blurred, his heart throbbing so fiercely that the blood seemed to be drowning out other sounds

for all time to come. In the dim corridor stood the two men, watching him with bated breath and guilty, quaking nerves.

"Oh!" gasped Lorry, kissing the missive insanely, as his greedy eyes careened through the last line. There was no signature, but in every word he saw her face, felt the touch of her dear hand, heard her timid heart beating for him—for him alone. Rapture thrilled him from head to foot, the delirious rapture of love. He could not speak, so overpowering was the joy, the surprise, the awakening.

"Obey!" whispered Quinnox, his face aglow with pleasure, his finger quivering as he pointed commandingly toward the letter.

"Obey what?" asked Lorry, dully.

"The last line!"

He hastily re-read the last line and then deliberately held the precious missive over the lamp until it ignited. He would have given all he possessed to have preserved it. But the last line commanded: "Burn this at once, and in the presence of the bearer."

"There!" he said, regretfully, as he crumpled the charred remnants between his fingers and turned to the silent watchers.

"Her crime goes up in smoke," muttered Dangloss, sententiously.

"The Princess commits no crime," retorted Quinnox, angrily, "when she trusts four honest men."

"Where is she?" whispered the prisoner, with thrumming ears.

"Where all good women should be at nine o'clock —in bed," replied Dangloss, shortly. "But will you obey her command?"

"So she commands me to escape!" said Lorry, smiling. "I dare not disobey my sovereign, I suppose."

"We obey her because we love her," said the captain of the guard.

"And for that reason I also obey. But can this thing be accomplished without necessitating explanations and possible complications? I will not obey if it is likely to place her in an embarrassing position."

"She understands perfectly what she is doing, sir. In the first place, she has had my advice," said Dangloss, the good old betrayer of an official trust.

"You advised her to command you to allow me to escape?"

"She commanded first, and then I advised her how to command you. Axphain may declare a war a thousand times over, but you will be safe. That's all we—I mean, all she wants."

"But I cannot desert my friend. How is he to know where I've gone? Will not vengeance fall on him instead?"

"He shall know everything when the proper time comes. And now, will you be ready at the hour

mentioned? You have but to follow the instructions—I should say, the commands of the writer."

"And be free! Tell her that I worship her for this. Tell her that every drop of blood in my body belongs to her. She offers me freedom, but makes me her slave for life. Yes, I shall be ready. If I do not see you again, good friends, remember that I love you because you love her and because she loves you enough to entrust a most dangerous secret to your keeping, the commission of an act that may mean the downfall of your nation." He shook hands with them fervently.

"It cannot be that, sir. It may cost the lives of three of her subjects, but no man save yourself can involve the Princess or the Crown. They may kill us, but they cannot force us to betray her. I trust you will be as loyal to the good girl who wears a crown, not upon her heart," said Dangloss, earnestly.

"I have said my life is hers, gentlemen," said Lorry, simply. "God, if I could but throw myself at her feet! I must see her before I go. I will not go without telling her what is in my heart!" he added, passionately.

"You must obey the commands implicitly, on your word of honor, or the transaction ends now," said Quinnox, firmly.

"This escape means, then, that I am not to see

her again," he said, his voice choking with emotion.

"Her instructions are that you are to go to-night, at once," said Dangloss, and the black-eyed soldier nodded confirmation.

The prisoner paced the floor of his cell, his mind a jumble of conflicting emotions. His clenched hands, twitching lips and half-closed eyes betrayed the battle that was inflicting him with its carnage. Suddenly he darted to the door, crying:

"Then I refuse to obey! Tell her that if she permits me to leave this hole I shall be at her feet before another night has passed. Say to her that I refuse to go from Graustark until I have seen her and talked with her. You, Quinnox, go to her now and tell her this, and say to her also that there is something she must hear from my own lips. Then I will leave Graustark and not till then, even though death be the alternative." The two men stared at him in amazement and consternation.

"You will not escape?" gasped Quinnox.

"I will not be dragged away without seeing her," he answered, resolutely, throwing himself on the bed.

"Damned young ass!" growled Dangloss. The soldier's teeth grated. A moment later the slab door closed softly, a key rattled, and his visitors were gone—messengers bearing to him the most positive proof of devotion that man could exact.

What had she offered to do for his sake? She had planned his escape, had sanctioned the commission of an unparalleled outrage against the laws of her land—she, of all women, a Princess! But she also had sought to banish him from the shrine at which his very soul worshiped, a fate more cruel and unendurable than the one she would have saved him from.

He looked at his hands and saw the black stains from the charred letter, last evidence of the crime against the State. A tender light came to his eyes, a great lump struggled to his throat, and he kissed the sooty spots, murmuring her name again and again. How lonely he was! how cold and cheerless his cage! For the first time he began to appreciate the real seriousness of his position. Up to this time he had regarded it optimistically, confident of vindication and acquittal. His only objection to imprisonment grew out of annoyance and the mere deprivation of liberty. It had not entered his head that he was actually facing death at close range. Of course, it had been plain to him that the charges were serious, and that he was awkwardly situated, but the true enormity of his peril did not dawn upon him until freedom was offered in such a remarkable manner. He grew cold and shuddered instinctively as he realized that his position was so critical that the Princess had deemed it necessary to resort to strategic measures in order to save him from im-

pending doom. Starting to his feet, he paced the floor, nervousness turning to dread, dread to terror. He pounded on the door and cried aloud. Oh, if he could but bring back those kindly messengers!

Exhausted, torn by conflicting emotions, he at last dropped to the bed and buried his face in his arms, nearly mad with the sudden solitude of despair. He recalled her dear letter—the tender, helping hand that had been stretched out to lift him from the depths into which he was sinking. She had written—he could see the words plainly—that his danger was great; she could not endure life until she knew him to be safely outside the bounds of Graustark. His life was dear to her, and she would preserve it by dishonoring her trust. Then she had unfolded her plan of escape, disjointedly, guiltily, hopelessly. In one place near the end, she wrote: "You have done much more for me than you know, so I pray that God may be good enough to let me repay you so far as it lies within my power to do so." In another place she said: "You may trust my accomplices, for they love me, too." An admission unconsciously made, that word "too."

But she was offering him freedom only to send him away without granting one moment of joy in her presence. After all, with death staring him in the face, the practically convicted murderer of a Prince, he knew he could not have gone without seeing her. He had been ungrateful, perhaps, but the

message he had sent her was from his heart, and something told him that it would give her pleasure.

A key turned suddenly in the lock, and his heart bounded with the hope that it might be some one with her surrender in response to his ultimatum. He sat upright and rubbed his swollen eyes. The door swung open, and a tall prison guard peered in upon him, a sharp-eyed, low-browed fellow in rain coat and helmet. His lantern's single unkind eye was turned menacingly toward the bed.

"What do you want?" demanded the prisoner, irritably.

Instead of answering, the guard proceeded to unlock the second or grated door, stepping inside the cell a moment later. Smothering an exclamation, Lorry jerked out his watch and then sprang to his feet, intensely excited. It was just twelve o'clock, and he remembered now that she had said a guard would come to him at that hour. Was this the man? Was the plan to be carried out?

The two men stood staring at each other for a moment or two, one in the agony of doubt and suspense, the other quizzically. A smile flitted over the face of the guard; he calmly advanced to the table, putting down his lantern. Then he drew off his rain coat and helmet and placed in the other's hand a gray envelope. Lorry reeled and would have fallen but for the wall against which he staggered. A note from her was in his hand. He tore open the

envelope and drew forth the letter. As he read he grew strangely calm and contented; a blissful repose rushed in to supplant the racking unrest of a moment before; the shadows fled and life's light was burning brightly once more. She had written:

"I entreat you to follow instructions and go to-night. You say you will not leave Graustark until you have seen me. How rash you are to refuse liberty and life for such a trifle. But why, I ask, am I offering you this chance to escape? Is it because I do not hope to see you again? Is it not enough that I am begging, imploring you to go? I can say no more."

He folded the brief note, written in agitation, and, after kissing it, proceeded to place it in his pocket, determined to keep it till the last hour of his life. Glancing up at a sound from the guard, he found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver. A deep scowl overspread the face of the man as he pointed to the letter and then to the lamp. There was no mistaking his meaning. Lorry reluctantly held the note over the flame and saw it crumble away as had its predecessor. There was to be no proof of her complicity left behind. He knew it would be folly to offer a bribe to the loyal guard.

After this very significant act the guard's face cleared, and he deposited his big revolver on the table. Stepping to the cell's entrance, he listened intently, then softly closed the heavy iron doors.

Without a word, he began to strip off his uniform, Lorry watching him as if fascinated. The fellow looked up impatiently and motioned for him to be quick, taking it for granted that the prisoner understood his part of the transaction. Awakened by this sharp reminder, Lorry nervously began to remove his own clothes. In five minutes his garments were scattered over the floor and he was attired in the uniform of a guard. Not a word had been spoken. The prisoner was the guard, the guard a prisoner.

"Are you not afraid this will cost you your life?" asked Lorry, first in English, then in German. The guard merely shook his head, indicating that he could not understand.

He quickly turned to the bed, seized a sheet and tore it into strips, impatiently thrusting them into the other's hands. The first letter had foretold all this, and the prisoner knew what was expected of him. He therefore securely bound the guard's legs and arms. With a grim smile, the captive nodded his head toward the revolver, the lantern and the keys. His obliging prisoner secured them, as well as his own personal effects, and was ready to depart. According to instructions, he was to go forth, locking the doors behind him, leaving the man to be discovered the next morning by surprised keepers. It struck him that there was something absurd in this part of the plan. How was this guard to explain his position with absolutely no sign of a struggle to bear

him out? It was hardly plausible that a big, strong fellow could be so easily overpowered single-handed; there was something wretchedly incongruous about the—but there came a startling and effective end to all criticism.

The guard, bound as he was, suddenly turned and lunged head-foremost against the sharp bedpost. His head struck with a thud, and he rolled to the floor as if dead. Uttering an exclamation of horror, Lorry ran to his side. Blood was gushing from a long gash across his head, and he was already unconscious. Sickened by the brave sacrifice, he picked the man up and placed him on the bed. A hasty examination proved that it was no more than a scalp wound, and that death was too remote to be feared. The guard had done his part nobly, and it was now the prisoner's turn to act as resolutely and as unflinchingly. Sorry to leave the poor fellow in what seemed an inhuman manner, he strode into the corridor, closed and locked the doors clumsily, and began the descent of the stairs. He had been instructed to act unhesitatingly, as the slightest show of nervousness would result in discovery.

With the helmet well down over his face and the cape well up, he steadily, even noisily made his way to the next floor below. There were prisoners on this floor, while he had been the only occupant of the floor above. Straight ahead he went, flashing his lantern here and there, passing down another

stairway and into the main corridor. Here he met a guard who had just come in from the outside. The man addressed him in the language of the country, and his heart almost stopped beating. How was he to answer? Mumbling something almost inaudible, he hurried on to the ground floor, trembling with fear lest the man should call to him to halt. He was relieved to find, in the end, that his progress was not to be impeded. In another moment he was boldly unlocking the door that led to the visitor's hall. Then came the door to the warden's office. Here he found three sleepy guards, none of whom paid any attention to him as he passed through and entered Captain Dangloss's private room. The gruff old captain sat at a desk, writing. The escaping man half paused, as if to speak to him. A sharp cough from the captain and a significant jerk of the head told him that there must be no delay, no words. Opening the door, he stepped out into a storm so fierce and wild that he shuddered apprehensively.

"A fitting night!" he muttered, as he plunged into the driving rain, forcing his way across the courtyard toward the main gate. The little light in the gate-keeper's window was his guide, so, blinded by the torrents, blown by the winds, he soon found himself before the final barrier. Peering through the window, he saw the keeper dozing in his chair. By the light from within, he selected from the bunch of keys he carried one that had a white string

knotted in its ring. This was the key that was to open the big gate in case no one challenged him. In any other case, he was to give the countersign, "Dangloss," and trust fortune to pass him through without question.

Luck was with him, and, finding the great lock, he softly inserted and turned the key. The wind blew the heavy gate open violently, and it required all of his strength to keep it from banging against the wall beyond. The most difficult task that he had encountered grew from his efforts to close the gate against the blast. He was about to give up in despair, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and some one hissed in his startled ear:

"Sh! Not a word!"

His legs almost went from under his body, so great was the shock and the fear. Two strong hands joined his own in the effort to pull the door into position, and he knew at once that they belonged to the man who was to meet him on the corner at the right of the prison wall. He undoubtedly had tired of the delay, and, feeling secure in the darkness of the storm, had come to meet his charge, the escaping prisoner. Their united efforts brought about the desired result, and together they left the prison behind, striking out against the storm in all its fury.

"You are late," called the prisoner in his ear.

"Not too late, am I?" he cried back, clutching the other's arm.

"No, but we must hasten."

"Captain Quinnox, is it you?"

"Have a care! The storm has ears and can hear names," cautioned the other. As rapidly as possible they made their way along the black streets, almost a river with its sheet of water. Lorry had lost his bearings, and knew not whither he went, trusting to the guidance of his struggling companion. There seemed to be no end to their journey, and he was growing weak beneath the exertion and the excitement.

"How far do we go?" he cried, at last.

"But a few rods. The carriage is at the next corner."

"Where is the carriage to take me?" he demanded.

"I am not at liberty to say."

"Am I to see her before I go?"

"That is something I cannot answer, sir. My instructions are to place you in the carriage and ride beside the driver until our destination is reached."

"Is it the castle?" cried the other, joyously.

"It is not the castle," was the disappointing answer.

At that moment they came upon a great dark hulk and heard the stamping of horses' hoofs close at hand. It was so dark they could scarcely discern the shape of the carriage, although they could touch its side with their hands.

A soldier stood in the shelter of the vehicle and opened the door for the American.

"Hurry! Get in!" exclaimed Quinnox.

"I wish to know if this is liable to get her into trouble," demanded Lorry, pausing with one foot on the steps.

"Get in!" commanded the soldier who was holding the door, pushing him forward uneasily. He floundered into the carriage, where all was dry and clean. In his hand he still carried the keys and the lantern, the slide of which he had closed before leaving the prison yard. He could not see, but he knew that the trappings of the vehicle were superior. Outside he heard the soldier, who was preparing to enter, say:

"This carriage travels on most urgent business for Her Royal Highness, captain. It is not to be stopped."

A moment later he was inside and the door slammed. The carriage rocked as Quinnox swung up beside the driver.

"You may as well be comfortable," said Lorry's companion, as he sat rigid and restless. "We have a long and rough ride before us."

XIX

THE SOLDIER

Off went the carriage with a dash, the rumble of its wheels joining in the grewsome roar of the elements. For some time the two sat speechless, side by side. Outside the thunder rolled, the rain swirled and hissed, the wind howled and all the horrors of nature seemed crowded into the blackness of that thrilling night. Lorry wondered vaguely whither they were going, why he had seen no flashes of lightning, if he should ever see her again. His mind was busy with a thousand thoughts and queries.

"Where are we going?" he asked, after they had traveled half a mile or so.

"To a place of safety," came the reply from the darkness beside him.

"Thanks," he said, drily. "By the way, don't you have any lightning in this part of the world? I haven't seen a flash to-night."

"It is very rare," came the brief reply.

"Devilish uncommunicative," thought Lorry. After a moment he asked: "How far do we travel to-night?"

"A number of miles."

"Then I'm going to take off this wet coat. It weighs a ton. Won't you remove yours?" He jerked off the big rain coat and threw it across the opposite seat, with the keys and the lantern. There was a moment's hesitation on the part of his companion, and then a second wet coat followed the first. Their rain helmets were also tossed aside "Makes a fellow feel more comfortable."

"This has been too easy to seem like an escape," went on Lorry, looking back reflectively over the surprises of the night. "Maybe I am dreaming. Pinch me."

A finger and a thumb came together on the fleshy part of his arm, causing him to start, first in amazement, then in pain. He had not expected his reserved guardian to obey the command literally.

"I am awake, thanks," he laughed, and the hand dropped from his arm.

After this there was a longer silence than at any time before. The soldier drew himself into the corner of the seat, an action which repelled further discussion, it seemed to Lorry, so he leaned back in the opposite corner and allowed his mind to wander far from the interior of that black, stuffy carriage. Where was he going? When was he to leave Graustark? Was he to see her soon?

Soon the carriage left the smooth streets of Edelweiss, and he could tell, by the jolting and careening, that they were in the country, racing over a

rough, rocky road. It reminded him of an overland trip he had taken in West Virginia some months before, with the fairest girl in all the world as his companion. Now he was riding in her carriage, but with a surly, untalkative soldier of the guard. The more he allowed his thoughts to revel in the American ride and its delights, the more uncontrollable became his desire to see the one who had whirled with him in "Light-horse Jerry's" coach.

"I wish to know how soon I am to see your mistress," he exclaimed, impulsively, sitting up and striking his companion's arm by way of emphasis. To his surprise, the hand was dashed away, and he distinctly heard the soldier gasp. "I beg your pardon!" he cried, fearing that he had given pain with his eager strength.

"You startled me—I was half asleep," stammered the other, apologetically. "Whom do you mean by my mistress?"

"Her Royal Highness, of course," said Lorry, impatiently.

"I cannot say when you are to see the Princess," said his companion, after waiting so long that Lorry felt like kicking him.

"Well, see here, my friend, do you know why I agreed to leave that place back there? I said I wouldn't go away from Graustark until I had seen her. If you fellows are spiriting me away—kidnapping me, as it were,—I want to tell you I won't have

it that way. I must know, right now, where we are going in this damnable storm."

"I have orders to tell you nothing," said the soldier, staunchly.

"Orders, eh! From whom?"

"That is my affair, sir!"

"I guess I'm about as much interested in this affair as anybody, and I insist on knowing our destination. I jumped into this thing blindly, but I'm going to see my way out of it before we go much farther. Where are we going?"

"You—you will learn that soon enough," insisted the other.

"Am I to see her soon? That's what I want to know."

"You must not insist," cried the soldier. "Why are you so anxious to see her?" he asked, suddenly.

"Don't be so blamed inquisitive," cried Grenfall, angrily, impatiently. "Tell me where we are going or I'll put a bullet into you!" Drawing his revolver, he leaned over, grasped the guard by the shoulder and placed the muzzle against his breast.

"For God's sake be calm! You would not kill me for obeying orders! I am serving one you love. Are you mad? I shall scream if you keep pressing that horrid thing against my side." Lorry felt him tremble, and was at once filled with compunction.

How could he expect a loyal fellow to disobey orders?

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," he cried, jamming the pistol into his pocket. "You are a brave gentleman and I am a fool. Take me where you will; I'll go like a lamb. You'll admit, however, that it is exasperating to be going in the dark like this."

"It is a very good thing that it is dark," said the soldier, quickly. "The darkness is very kind to us. No one can see us and we can see no one."

"I should say not. I haven't the faintest idea what you look like. Have I seen you at the castle?"

"Yes, frequently."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"You would not know me by name."

"Are you an officer?"

"No; I am new to the service."

"Then I'll see that you are promoted. I like your staunchness. How old are you?"

"I am—er—twenty-two."

"Of the nobility?"

"My father was of noble birth."

"Then you must be so, too. I hope you'll forgive my rudeness. I'm a bit nervous, you know."

"I forgive you gladly."

"Devilish rough road, this."

"Devilish. It is a mountain road."

"That's where we were, too."

"Where who were?"

"Oh, a young lady and I, some time ago. I just happened to think of it."

"It could not have been pleasant."

"You never made a bigger mistake in your life."

"Oh, she must have been pretty, then."

"You are right this time. She is glorious."

"Pardon me! They usually are in such adventures."

"By Jove, you're a clever one!"

"Does she live in America?"

"That's none of your affair."

"Oh!" And then there was silence between them.

"Inquisitive fool!" muttered Gren to himself.

For some time they bumped along over the rough road, jostling against each other frequently, both enduring stoically and silently. The rain was still falling, but the thunder storm had lost its fury. The crashing in the sky had abated, the winds were not so fierce, the night was being shorn of its terrors. Still the intense, almost suffocating darkness prevailed. But for the occasional touch neither could have told that there was another person on the seat. Suddenly Lorry remembered the lantern. It was still lit with the slide closed when he threw it on the seat. Perhaps it still burned and could relieve the oppressive darkness if but for a short time. He might, at least, satisfy his curiosity and look upon

the face of his companion. Leaning forward, he fumbled among the traps on the opposite seat.

"I think I'll see if the lantern is lighted. Let's have it a little more cheerful in here," he said. There was a sharp exclamation, and two vigorous hands grasped him by the shoulder, jerking him back unceremoniously.

"No! No! You will ruin all! There must be no light," cried the soldier, his voice high and shrill.

"But we are out of the city."

"I know! I know! But I will not permit you to have a light. Against orders. We have not passed the outpost," expostulated the other, nervously.

"What's the matter with your voice?" demanded Lorry, struck by the change in it.

"My voice?" asked the other, the tones natural again. "It's changing. Didn't it embarrass you when your voice broke like that?" went on the questioner, breathlessly. Lorry was now leaning back in the seat, quite a little mystified.

"I don't believe mine ever broke like *that*," he said, speculatively. There was no response, and he sat silent for some time, regretting more and more that it was so dark.

Gradually he became conscious of a strange, unaccountable presence in that dark cab. He could feel a change coming over him; he could not tell why, but he was sure that some one else was beside him, some one who was not the soldier. Something

soft and delicate and sweet came into existence, permeating the darkness with its undeniable presence. A queer power seemed drawing him toward the other end of the seat. The most delightful sensations took possession of him; his heart fluttered oddly; his head began to reel under the spell.

"Who are you?" he cried in a sort of ecstacy. There was no answer. He remembered his match-safe, and, with trembling, eager fingers, drew it from the pocket of the coat he was wearing. The next instant he was scratching a match, but as it flared the body of his companion was hurled against his and a ruthless mouth blew out the feeble blaze.

"Oh, why do you persist?" was cried in his ears.

"I am determined to see your face," he answered sharply, and with a little cry of dismay the other occupant of the carriage fell back in the corner. The next match drove away the darkness and the mystery. With blinking eyes, he saw the timid soldier huddling in the corner, one arm covering his face, the other hand vainly striving to pull the skirt of a military coat over a pair of red trouser-legs. Below the arm that hid the eyes and nose he saw parted lips and a beardless, dainty chin; above, long, dark tresses strayed in condemning confusion. The breast beneath the blue coat heaved convulsively.

The match dropped from his fingers, and, as darkness fell again, it hid the soldier in the strong arms of the fugitive—not a soldier bold, but a gasping,

blushing, unresisting coward. The little form quivered and then became motionless in the fierce, straining embrace; the head dropped upon his shoulder, his hot lips caressing the burning face and pouring wild, incoherent words into the little ears.

"You! You!" he cried, mad with joy. "Oh, this is Heaven itself! My brave darling! Mine forever—mine forever! You shall never leave me now! Drive on! Drive on!" he shouted to the men outside, drunk with happiness. "We'll make this journey endless. I know you love me now—I know it! God, I shall die with joy!"

A hand stole gently into his hand, and her lips found his in a long, passionate kiss.

"I did not want you to know! Ach, I am so sorry! Why, why did I come to-night? I was so strong, so firm, I thought, but see how weak I am. You dominate,—you own me, body and soul, in spite of everything,—against my will. I love you—I love you—I love you!"

"I have won against the Princess and the potentates! I was losing hope, my Queen, losing hope. You were so far away, so unattainable. I would brave a thousand deaths rather than lose this single minute of my life. It makes me the richest man in all the world. How brave you are! This night you have given up everything for my sake. You are fleeing with me, away from all that has been dear to you."

"No, no. You must not be deluded. It is only for to-night, only till you are safe from pursuit. I shall go back. You must not hope for more than this hour of weakness, sweet as it is to me," she cried.

"You are going back, and not with me?" he cried, his heart chilling.

"You know I cannot. That is why I hoped you would never know how much I care for you. Alas, you have found me out! My love was made rash by fear. You could never have escaped the vengeance of Axphain. I could not have shielded you. This was the only course and I dared not hesitate. I should have died with terror had you gone to trial, knowing what I knew. You will not think me unwomanly for coming with you as I am. It was necessary—really it was! No one else could have——" But he smothered the wail in kisses.

"Unwomanly!" he exclaimed. "It was by divine inspiration. But you *will* come with me, away from Graustark, away from every one. Say that you will!"

"I cannot bear to hear you plead, and it breaks my heart to go back there. But I cannot leave Graustark—I cannot! It would be Heaven to go with you to the end of the world, but I have others besides myself to consider. You are my god, my idol. I can worship you from my unhappy throne, from my chamber, from the cell into which my heart

is to retreat. But I cannot, I will not, desert Graustark. Not even for you!"

He was silent, impressed by her nobility, her loyalty. Although the joy ebbed from his craving heart, he saw the justice of her self-sacrifice.

"I would give my soul to see your face now, Yetive. Your soul is in your eyes; I can feel it. Why did you not let me stay in prison, meet death and so end all? It would have been better for both of us. I cannot live without you."

"We can live for each other, die for each other,—apart. Distance will not lessen my love. You know that it exists; it has been betrayed to you. Can you not be satisfied—just a little bit—with that knowledge?" she pleaded.

"But I want you in reality, not in my dreams, my imagination."

"Ach, we must not talk like this! There is no alternative. You are to go, I am to stay. The future is before us; God knows what it may bring to us. Perhaps it may be good enough to give us happiness —who knows? Do not plead with me. I cannot endure it. Let me be strong again! You will not be so cruel as to battle against me, now that I am weak; it would only mean my destruction. You do not seek that!"

His soul, his honor, the greatest reverence he had ever known were in the kiss that touched her brow.

"I shall love you as you command—without hope," he said, sadly.

"Without hope for either," she sobbed.

"My poor little soldier," he whispered, lovingly, as her body writhed under the storm of tears.

"I—I wish—I were a—soldier!" she wailed. He comforted her as best he could and soon she was quiet—oh, so very quiet. Her head was on his shoulder, her hands in his.

"How far do we drive?" he asked, at last.

"To the monastery. We are nearly there," she answered, in tones far away.

"The monastery? Why do we go there?" he cried.

"You are to stay there."

"What do you mean? I thought I was to leave Graustark."

"You are to leave—later on. Until the excitement is over the abbey is to be your hiding place. I have arranged everything, and it is the only safe place on earth for you at this time. No one will think of looking for you up there."

"I would to God I could stay there forever, living above you," he said, drearily.

"Your window looks down upon the castle; mine looks up to yours. The lights that burn in those two windows will send out beams of love and life for one of us at least."

"For both of us, my sweetheart," he corrected,

fondly. "You say I will be safe there. Can you trust these men who are aiding you?"

"With my life! Quinnox carried a message to the Abbot yesterday, and he grants you a temporary home there, secure and as secret as the tomb. He promises me this, and he is my best friend. Now, let me tell you why I am with you, masquerading so shamefully——"

"Adorably!" he protested.

"It is because the Abbot insisted that I bring you to him personally. He will not receive you except from my hands. There was nothing else for me to do, then, was there, Mr. Lorry? I was compelled to come and I could not come as the Princess —as a woman. Discovery would have meant degradation from which I could not have hoped to recover. The military garments were my only safeguard."

"And how many people know of your—deception?"

"Three—besides yourself. Dagmar, Quinnox and Captain Dangloss. The Abbot will know later on, and I shiver as I think of it. The driver and the man who went to your cell, Ogbot, know of the escape, but do not know I am here. Allode—you remember him—is our driver."

"Allode? He's the fellow who saw me—er—who was in the throne room."

"He is the man who saw nothing, sir."

"I remember his obedience," he said, laughing in spite of his unhappiness. "Am I to have no freedom up here—no liberty at all?"

"You are to act as the Abbot or the prior instructs. And, I must not forget, Quinnox will visit you occasionally. He will conduct you from the monastery and to the border line at the proper time."

"Alas! He will be my murderer, I fear. Yetive, you do not believe I killed Lorenz. I know that most of them do, but, I swear to you, I am no more the perpetrator of that cowardly crime than you. God bears testimony to my innocence. I want to hear you say that you do not believe I killed him."

"I feared so at first,—no, do not be angry—I feared you had killed him for my sake. But now I am sure that you are innocent."

The carriage stopped too soon, and Quinnox opened the door. It was still as dark as pitch, but the downpour had ceased except for a disagreeable, misty drizzle, cold and penetrating.

"We have reached the stopping place," he said.

"And we are to walk from here to the gate," said the Princess, resuming her hoarse, manly tones. While they were busy donning their rain coats, she whispered in Lorry's ear: "I beg of you, do not let him know that you have discovered who I am."

He promised, and lightly snatched a kiss, an act of indiscretion that almost brought fatal results. Forgetful of the darkness, she gave vent to a little

protesting shriek, fearing that the eyes of the captain had witnessed the pretty transgression. Lorry laughed as he sprang to the road and turned to assist her in alighting. She promptly and thoughtfully averted the danger his gallantry presented by ignoring the outstretched hands, discernable as slender shadows protruding from an object a shade darker than the night, and leaped boldly to the ground. The driver was instructed to turn the carriage about and wait their return.

With Lorry in the center, the trio walked rapidly off in the darkness, the fugitive with the sense of fear that belongs only to a blind man. A little light far ahead told the position of the gate, and for this they bent their steps, Lorry and Quinnox conversing in low tones, the Princess striding along silently beside the former, her hand in his—a fact of which the real soldier was totally unaware. Reaching the gate, the captain pounded vigorously, and a sleepy monk soon peered from the little window through which shone the light.

"On important business with the Abbot, from Her Royal Highness, the Princess Yetive," said Quinnox, in response to a sharp query, spoken in the Graustark tongue. A little gate beside the big one opened, and the monk, lantern in hand, bade them enter.

"Await me here, captain," commanded the slim, straight soldier, with face turned from the light. A

moment later the gate closed and Lorry was behind the walls of St. Valentine's a prisoner again. The monk preceded them across the dark court toward the great black mass, his lantern creating ghastly shadows against the broken mist. His followers dropped some little distance behind, the tall one's arm stealing about the other's waist, his head bending to a level with hers.

"Is it to be good-bye, dearest?" he asked. "Good-bye forever?"

"I cannot say that. It would be like wishing you dead. Yet there is no hope. No, no! We will not say good-bye,—forever," she said, despairingly.

"Won't you bid me hope?"

"Impossible! You will stay here until Quinnox comes to take you away. Then you must not stop until you are in your own land. We may meet again——"

"Yes, by my soul, we shall meet again! I'll do as you bid and all that, but I'll come back when I can stay away no longer. Go to your castle and look forward to the day that will find me at your feet again. It is bound to come. But how are you to return to the castle to-night and enter without creating suspicion? Have you thought of that?"

"Am I a child? Inside of three hours I shall be safely in my bed and but one person in the castle will be the wiser for my absence. Here are the portals." They passed inside the massive doors and

halted. "You must remain here until I have seen the prior," she said, laughing nervously and glancing down at the boots which showed beneath the long coat. Then she hastily followed the monk, disappearing down the corridor. In ten minutes—ten hours to Lorry—she returned with her guide.

"He will take you to your room," she said breathlessly, displaying unmistakable signs of embarrassment. "The prior *was* shocked. Good-bye, and God be with you always. Remember, I love you!"

The monk's back was turned, so the new recluse snatched the slight figure to his heart.

"Some day?" he whispered.

She would not speak, but he held her until she nodded her head.

XX

THE APPROACHING ORDEAL

"The American has escaped!" was the cry that spread through Edelweiss the next morning.

It brought undisguised relief to the faces of thousands; there was not one who upbraided Baron Dangloss for his astounding negligence. Never before had a criminal escaped from the Tower. The only excuse, uttered in woe-begone tone, was that the prison had not been constructed or manned for such clever scoundrels as Yankees—good name for audacity. But as nobody criticised, his explanation was taken good-naturedly and there was secret rejoicing in the city. Of course, everybody wondered where the prisoner had gone; most of them feared that he could not escape the officers, while others shrewdly smiled and expressed themselves as confident that so clever a gentleman could not be caught. They marveled at his boldness, his ingenuity, his assurance.

The full story of the daring break for liberty flashed from lip to lip during the day, and it was known all over the water-swept city before noon.

Baron Dangloss, himself, had gone to the prisoner's cell early in the morning, mystified by the continued absence of the guard. The door was locked, but from within came groans and cries. Alarmed at once, the captain procured duplicate keys and entered the cell. There he found the helpless, blood-covered Ogbot, bound hand and foot and almost dead from loss of blood. The clothes of the American were on the floor, while his own were missing, gone with the prisoner. Ogbot, as soon as he was able, related his experience of the night before. It was while making his rounds at midnight that he heard moans from the cell. Animated by a feeling of pity, he opened the slab door and asked if he were ill. The wretched American was lying on the bed, apparently suffering. He said something which the guard could not understand, but which he took to be a plea for assistance. Not suspecting a trick, the kindly guard unlocked the second door and stepped to the bedside, only to have the sick man rise suddenly and deal him a treacherous blow over the head with the heavy stool he had secreted behind him. Ogbot knew nothing of what followed, so effective was the blow. When he regained consciousness he was lying on the bed, just as the captain had found him. The poor fellow, overwhelmed by the enormity of his mistake, begged Dangloss to shoot him at once. But Dangloss had him conveyed to the hospital ward and tenderly cared for.

Three guards in one of the offices saw a man whom they supposed to be Ogbot pass from the prison shortly after twelve, and the mortified chief admitted that some one had gone through his private apartment. As the prisoner had taken Ogbot's keys, he experienced little difficulty in getting outside the gates. But, vowed Dangloss, stormily, he should be recaptured if it required the efforts of all the policemen in Edelweiss. With this very brave declaration in mind, he despatched men to search every street and every alley, every cellar and every attic in the city. Messengers were sent to all towns in the district; armed posses scoured the valley and the surrounding forests, explored the caves and brush heaps for miles around. The chagrin of the grim old captain, who had never lost a prisoner, was pitiful to behold.

The forenoon was half over before Harry Anguish heard of his friend's escape. To say that he was paralyzed would be putting it much too mildly. There is no language that can adequately describe his sensations. Forgetting his bodyguard, he tore down the street toward the prison, wild with anxiety and doubt. He met Baron Dangloss, tired and worn, near the gate, but the old officer could tell him nothing except what he had learned from Ogbot. Of one thing there could be no doubt: Lorry was gone. Not knowing where to turn nor what to do, Anguish raced off to the castle, his bodyguard

having located him in the meantime. He was more in need of their protection than ever. At the castle gates he encountered a party of raving Axphainians, crazed with anger over the flight of the man whose life they had thirsted for so ravenously. Had he been unprotected, Anguish would have fared badly at their hands, for they were outspoken in their assertions that he had aided Lorry in the escape. One fiery little fellow cast a glove in the American's face and expected a challenge. Anguish snapped his fingers and sarcastically invited the insulter to meet him next winter in a battle with snowballs, upon which the aggressor blasphemed in three languages and three hundred gestures. Anguish and his men passed inside the gates, which had been barred to the others, and struck out rapidly for the castle doors.

The Princess Yetive was sleeping soundly, peacefully, with a smile on her lips, when her Prime Minister sent an excited attendant to inform her of the prisoner's escape. She sat up in bed, and, with her hands clasped about her knees, sleepily announced that she would receive him after her coffee was served. Then she thought of the wild, sweet ride to the monastery, the dangerous return, her entrance to the castle through the secret subterranean passage and the safe arrival in her own room. All had gone well and he was safe. She smiled quaintly as she glanced at the bundle of clothes on the floor,

blue and black and red. They had been removed in the underground passage and a loose gown substituted, but she had carried them to her chamber with the intention of placing them for the time being in the old mahogany chest that had held so many of her childhood treasures. Springing out of bed, she opened the chest, cast them into its depths, turned and removed the key which had always remained in the lock. Then she summoned her maids.

Her uncle and aunt, the Countess Dagmar (whose merry brown eyes were so full of pretended dismay that the Princess could scarcely restrain a smile), and Gaspon, the Minister of Finance, were awaiting her appearance. She heard the count's story of the escape, marveled at the prisoner's audacity, and firmly announced that everything possible should be done to apprehend him. With a perplexed frown on her brow and a dubious twist of her lips, she said:

"I suppose I must offer a reward?"

"Certainly!" exclaimed her uncle.

"About fifty gavvos, uncle?"

"Fifty!" cried the two men, aghast.

"Isn't that enough?"

"For the murderer of a Prince?" demanded Gaspon. "It would be absurd, Your Highness. He is a most important person."

"Quite so; he *is* a most important person. I think I'll offer five thousand gavvos."

"More like it. He is worth that, at least," agreed Uncle Caspar.

"Beyond a doubt," sanctioned Gaspon.

"I am glad you do not consider me extravagant," she said, demurely. "You may have the placards printed at once," she went on, addressing the Treasurer. "Say a reward of five thousand gavvos will be paid to the person who delivers Grenfall Lorry to me."

"Would it not be better to say 'delivers Grenfall Lorry to the Tower'?" submitted Gaspon.

"You may say 'to the undersigned,' and sign my name," she said, reflectively.

"Very well, Your Highness. They shall be struck off this morning."

"In large type, Gaspon. You must catch him if you can," she added. "He is a very dangerous man and royalty needs protection." With this wise bit of caution she dismissed the subject and began to talk of the storm.

As the two young plotters were hastening up the stairs later on, an attendant approached and informed the Princess that Mr. Anguish requested an audience.

"Conduct him to my boudoir," she said, her eyes sparkling with triumph. In the seclusion of the boudoir she and the Countess laughed like children over the reward that had been so solemnly ordered.

"Five thousand gavvos!" cried Dagmar, leaning

back in her chair, to emphasize the delight she felt. "What a joke!"

Tap, tap! came a knock on the door, and in the same instant it flew open, for Mr. Anguish was in a hurry. As he plunged into their presence a pair of heels found the floor spasmodically.

"Oh, I beg pardon!" he gasped, as if about to fly. "May I come in?"

"Not unless you go outside. You are already in, it seems," said the Princess, advancing to meet him. The Countess was very still and sedate. "I am so glad you have come."

"Heard about Lorry? The fool is out and gone," he cried, unable to restrain himself. Without a word, she dragged him to the divan, and, between them, he soon had the whole story poured into his ears, the Princess on one side, the Countess on the other.

"You are a wonder!" he exclaimed when all the facts were known to him. He executed a little dance of approval, entirely out of place in the boudoir of a Princess, but very much in touch with prevailing sentiment. "But what's to become of me?" he asked, after cooling down. "I have no excuse for remaining in Graustark and I don't like to leave him here, either."

"Oh, I have made plans for you," said she. "You are to be held as hostage."

"What?"

"I thought of your predicament last night, and here is the solution: This very day I shall issue an order forbidding you the right to leave Edelweiss. You will not be in prison, but your every movement is to be watched. A strong guard will have you under surveillance, and any attempt to escape or to communicate with your friend will result in your confinement and his detection. In this way you may stay here until the time comes to fly. The Axphain people must be satisfied, you know. Your freedom will not be disturbed; you may come and go as you like, but you are ostensibly a prisoner. By detaining you forcibly we gain a point, for you are needed here. There is no other way in which you can explain a continued presence in Graustark. Is not my plan a good one?"

He gazed in admiration at her flushed cheeks and glowing eyes.

"It is beyond comparison," he said, rising and bowing low. "So shrewd is this plan that you make me a hostage forever; I shall not mistake its memory if I live to be a thousand."

And so it was settled, in this pretty drama of deception, that Harry Anguish was to be held in Edelweiss as hostage. At parting, she said, seriously:

"A great deal depends on your discretion, Mr. Anguish. My guards will watch your every action, for they are not in the secret—excepting Quinnox,

—and any attempt on your part to communicate with Grenfall Lorry will be fatal."

"Trust me, Your Highness. I have had much instruction in wisdom to-day."

"I hope we shall see you often," she said.

"Daily—as a hostage," he replied, glancing toward the Countess.

"That means until the other man is captured," said that young lady, saucily.

As he left the castle he gazed at the distant building in the sky and wondered how it had ever been approached in a carriage. She had not told him that Allode drove four miles over the winding roads that led to the monastery up a gentler slope from the rear.

The next afternoon Edelweiss thrilled with a new excitement. Prince Bolaroz of Axphain, mad with grief and rage, came thundering into the city with his court at his heels. His wrath had been increased until it resembled a tornado when he read the reward placard in the uplands. Not until then did he know that the murderer had escaped and that vengeance might be denied him.

After viewing the body of Lorenz as it lay in the sarcophagus of the royal palace, where it had been borne at the command of the Princess Yetive, he demanded audience with his son's betrothed, and it was with fear that she prepared for the trying ordeal, an interview with the grief-crazed old man

The castle was in a furore; its halls soon thronged with diplomatists and there was an ugly sense of trouble in the air, suggestive of the explosion which follows the igniting of a powder magazine.

The slim, pale-faced Princess met the burly old ruler in the grand council chamber. He and his nobles had been kept waiting but a short time. Within a very few minutes after they had been conducted to the chamber by Count Halfont and other dignitaries, the fair ruler came into the room and advanced between the bowing lines of courtiers to the spot where sat the man who held Graustark in his grasp. A slender, graceful figure in black, proud and serious, she walked unhesitatingly to the old man's side. If she feared him, if she was impressed by his power, she did not show it. The little drama had two stars of equal magnitude, neither of whom acknowledged supremacy in the other.

Bolaroz arose as she drew near, his gaunt face black and unfriendly. She extended her hand graciously, and he, a Prince for all his wrath, touched his trembling lips to its white, smooth back.

"I come in grief and sadness to your court, most glorious Yetive. My burden of sorrow is greater than I can bear," he said, hoarsely.

"Would that I could give you consolation," she said, sitting in the chair reserved for her use at council gatherings. "Alas! it grieves me that I can offer nothing more than words."

"You are the one he would have made his wife," said the old Prince, sitting beside her. He looked into her deep blue eyes and tears sprung to his own. His voice failed him, and long moments passed before he could control his emotion. Truly she pitied him in his bereavement.

Then followed a formal discussion of the crime and the arrangement of details in connection with the removal of the dead Prince from Graustark to his own land. These matters settled, Bolaroz said that he had heard of the murderer's escape, and asked what effort was being made to recapture him. Yetive related all that had happened, expressing humiliation over the fact that her officers had been unable to accomplish anything, adding that she did not believe that the fugitive could get away from Graustark safely without her knowledge. The old Prince was working himself back into the violent rage that had been temporarily subdued, and at last broke out in a vicious denunciation of the carelessness that had allowed the man to escape. He first insisted that Dangloss and his incompetent assistants be thrown into prison for life or executed for criminal negligence; then he demanded the life of Harry Anguish as an aider and abettor in the flight of the murderer. In both cases the Princess firmly refused to take the action demanded. She warmly defended Dangloss and his men, and announced in no uncertain tones that she would not order the arrest of

the remaining American. Then she acquainted him with her intention to detain Anguish as hostage and to have his every action watched in the hope that a clue to the whereabouts of the fugitive might be discovered, providing, of course, that the friend knew anything at all about the matter. The Duke of Mizrox and others loudly joined in the cry for Anguish's arrest, but she bravely held out against them, and in the end curtly informed them that the American, whom she believed to be innocent of all complicity in the escape, should be subjected to no indignity other than detention in the city under guard, as she had ordered.

"I insist that this man be cast into prison at once," snarled the white-lipped Bolaroz.

Her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved with anger.

"You are not at liberty to command in Graustark, Prince Bolaroz," she said, slowly and distinctly. "I am ruler here."

The heart of every Graustark nobleman leaped with pride at this daring rebuff. Bolaroz gasped and was speechless for some seconds.

"You shall not be ruler long, madam," he said, malevolently, significantly.

"But I am ruler now, and, as such, I ask Your Highness to withdraw from my castle. I did not know that I was to submit to these threats and insults, or I should not have been kind enough to grant

you an audience, Prince though you are. When I came to this room it was to give you my deepest sympathy and to receive yours, not to be insulted. You have lost a son, I my betrothed. It ill becomes you, Prince Bolaroz, to vent your vindictiveness upon me. My men are doing all in their power to capture the man who has so unfortunately escaped from our clutches, and I shall not allow you or any one else to dictate the manner in which we are to proceed." She uttered these words cunningly, and, at their conclusion, arose to leave the room.

Bolaroz heard her through in surprise and with conflicting emotions. There was no mistaking her indignation, so he deemed it policy to bottle his wrath, overlook the most offensive rebuke his vanity had ever received, and submit to what was evidently a just decision.

"Stay, Your Highness. I submit to your proposition regarding the other stranger, although I doubt its wisdom. There is but one in whom I am really interested,—the one who killed my son. There is to be no cessation in the effort to find him, I am to understand. I now have a proposition. With me are three hundred of my bravest soldiers. I offer them to you in order that you may better prosecute the search. They will remain here and you may use them in any way you see fit. The Duke of Mizrox will linger in Edelweiss, and with him you and yours may always confer. He, also, is at your com-

mand. This man must be retaken. I swear, by all that is above and below me, he shall be found, if I hunt the world over to accomplish that end. He shall not escape my vengeance! And hark you to this! On the twentieth of next month I shall demand payment of the debt due Axphain. So deeply is my heart set on the death of this Grenfall Lorry that I agree now, before all these friends of ours, that if he be captured, and executed in my presence, before the twentieth of November, Graustark shall be granted the extension of time that would have obtained in the event of your espousal with the man he killed. You hear this offer, all? It is bound by my sacred word of honor. His death before the twentieth gives Graustark ten years of grace. If he is still at large, I shall claim my own. This offer, I believe, most gracious Yetive, will greatly encourage your people in the effort to capture the man we seek."

The Princess heard the remarkable proposition with a face deathly pale, heart scarcely beating. Again was the duty to Graustark thrust cruelly upon her. She could save the one only by sacrificing the other.

"We will do all in our power to—to prove ourselves grateful for your magnanimous offer," she said. As she passed from the room, followed by her uncle, she heard the increasing buzz of excitement on all sides, the unrestrained expressions of

amazement and relief from her subjects, the patronizing comments of the visitors, all conspiring to sound her doom. Which way was she to turn in order to escape from herself?

"We must catch this man, Yetive," said Halfont, on the stairway. "There is no alternative."

"Except our inability to do so," she murmured. In that moment she determined that Grenfall Lorry should never be taken if she could prevent it. He was innocent, and it was Graustark's penalty to pay.

The next day, amidst pomp and splendor, the Prince of Axphain started on his journey to the land of his forefathers, to the tombs of his ancestors, all Edelweiss witnessing the imposing procession that made its way through the north gates of the town. Far up on the mountain top a man, looking from his little window, saw the black, snakelike procession wind away across the plain to the northward, losing itself in the distant hills.

XXI

FROM A WINDOW ABOVE

The longest month in Lorry's life was that which followed his romantic flight from the Tower. To his impatient mind, the days were irksome weeks. The cold monastery was worse than a prison. He looked from its windows as a convict looks through his bars, always hoping, always disappointed. With each of the infrequent visits of Captain Quinnox, his heart leaped at the prospect of liberty, only to sink deeper in despair upon the receipt of emphatic, though kindly, assurances that the time had not yet come for him to leave the haven of safety into which he had been thrust by loving hands. From his little window he could see the active city below, with the adored castle; to his nostrils came the breath of summer from the coveted valley, filling him with almost insupportable longing and desire. Cold were the winds that swept about his lofty home; ghastly, grewsome the nights; pallid and desolate the days. Out of the world was he, dreary and heartsick, while at his feet stretched life and joy and love in their rarest habiliments. How he endured the suspense, the torture of uncertainty, the craving for the life that others were enjoying, he could not understand. Big,

strong and full of vigor, his inactivity was maddening; this virtual captivity grew more and more intolerable with each succeeding day. Would they never take him from the tomb in which he was existing? A hundred times had he, in his desperation, concluded to flee from the monastery, come what might, and to trust himself to the joyous world below, but the ever-present though waning spark of wisdom won out against the fierce, aggressive folly that mutinied within his hungry soul. He knew that she was guarding him with loving, tender care, and that, when the proper time came, the shackles of danger would drop and his way would be cleared.

Still there was the longing, the craving, the loneliness. Day after day, night after night went by and the end seemed no nearer. Awake or asleep, he dreamed of her, his heart and mind always full of that one rich blessing,—her love. At times he was mad with the desire to know what she was doing, what she was thinking and what was being done for her down there in the busy world. Lying on his pallet, sitting in the narrow window, pacing the halls or wandering about the cold courtyards, he thought always of her, hoping and despairing with equal fervor. The one great question that made his imprisonment, his inactivity so irksome was: Was he to possess the treasure he longed so much to call his own? In those tantalizing moments of despair

he felt that if he were free and near her he could win the fight against all odds. As it was, he knew not what mischief was working against his chances in the world from which he was barred.

The prior was kind to him; everything that could be done to provide comfort where comfort was a stranger was employed in his behalf. He lived well —until his appetite deserted him; he had no questions to answer, for no one asked why he was there; he had no danger to fear, for no foe knew where he lived. From the city came the promise of ultimate escape; verbal messages from those who loved him; news of the world,—all at long intervals, however. Quinnox's visits were like sunbeams to him. The dashing captain came only at night and in disguise. He bore verbal messages, a wise precaution against mishap. Not once did he bring a word of love from the Princess, an omission which caused the fugitive deep misery until a ray of intelligence showed him that she could not give to Quinnox the speeches from her heart, proud woman that she was.

Anguish sent words of cheer, with commands to be patient. He never failed to tell him, through Quinnox, that he was doing all in his power to find the real murderer, and that he had the secret cooperation of the old police captain. Of course, the hidden man heard of the reward and the frenzied search prosecuted by both principalities. He laughed

hysterically over the deception that was being practiced by the blue-eyed, slender woman who held the key to the situation in her keeping.

It was not until the night of the eighteenth of November that Quinnox confirmed his fears by telling him of the conditions imposed by Prince Bolaroz. For some reason, the young officer had deceived Lorry in regard to the all-important matter. The American repeatedly had begged for information about the fatal twentieth, but on all previous occasions his visitor doggedly maintained a show of ignorance, vowing that he knew nothing of the circumstances. Finally Lorry, completely out of patience and determined to know the true state of affairs, soundly upbraided him and sent word to the Princess that if she did not acquaint him with the inside facts he would leave the monastery and find them out for himself. This authoritative message brought Quinnox back two nights later with the full story of the exciting conference. She implored him to remain where he was, and asked his forgiveness for having kept the ugly truth from him. Quinnox added to his anguish by hastily informing him that there was a possibility of succor from another principality. Prince Gabriel, he said, not knowing that he was cutting his listener to the heart, was daily with the Princess, and it was believed that he was ready to loan Graustark sufficient money to meet the demand of Bolaroz. The mere

thought that Gabriel was with her aroused the fiercest resentment in Lorry's breast. He writhed beneath the knowledge that she was compelled to endure his advances, his protestations of love, his presence.

As he paced his narrow room distractedly a horrid thought struck him so violently that he cried aloud and staggered against the wall, his eyes fixed on the face of the startled soldier. Perhaps she might submit to Gabriel, for in submitting she could save not only Graustark, but the man she loved. The sacrifice—but no! he would not believe that such affliction could come to her! Marry Gabriel! The man who had planned to seize her and make her his wanton! He ground his teeth and glared at Quinnox as if he were the object of his hatred, his vicious jealousy. The captain stepped backward in sudden alarm.

"Don't be afraid!" Lorry cried savagely. "I'm not crazy. It's your news—your news! Does she expect me to stay up here while that state of affairs exists down there? Let me see: this is the eighteenth, and day after to-morrow is the twentieth. There is no time to be lost, Captain Quinnox. I shall accompany you when you leave St. Valentine's to-night."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Quinnox. "I cannot allow that, sir. My instructions are to——"

"Hang your instructions! All the instructions on

earth can't compel me to sit up here and see this sacrifice made. I am determined to see her and put a stop to the whole affair. It is what I feared would come to pass. She is willing to sacrifice herself or half her kingdom, one or the other, in order that I may escape. It's not right, captain, it's not right, and I'm going to stop it. How soon can we leave this place?" He was pacing the floor, happy in the decision he had reached, notwithstanding the danger it promised.

"You are mad, sir, to talk like this," protested the other, despairingly. "Edelweiss swarms with Axphain soldiers; our own men are on the alert to win the great reward. You cannot go to the city. When a safe time comes, you will be taken from this place, into the mountains instead of through the city, and given escort to Dassas, one hundred miles east. That step will not be taken until the way is perfectly clear. I tell you, sir, you cannot hope to escape if you leave the monastery now. The mountains are full of soldiers every night."

"I didn't say anything about an escape, did I? On the contrary, I want to give myself up to her. Then she can have Gabriel thrown over the castle wall and say to Bolaroz, 'Here is your man; I've gained the ten years of grace.' That's the point, Quinnox; can't you see it? And I want to say to you now, I'm going whether you consent or refuse. I'd just as soon be in jail down there as up here, any-

how. The only favor I have to ask of you is that you do the best you can to get me safely to her. I must talk to her before I go back to the Tower."

"God help me, sir, I cannot take you to her," groaned Quinnox, trying to control his nervous apprehension. "I have sworn to her that I will keep you from all harm, and it would be to break faith with her if I led you into that mob down there."

"I respect your oath, my friend, but I am going, just the same. I'll see her, too, if I have to shoot every man who attempts to prevent me. I'm desperate, man, desperate! She's everything in the world to me, and I'll die before I'll see her suffer."

Quinnox calmly placed his hands on the other's shoulders, and, looking him in the eye, said quietly:

"Her suffering now is as nothing compared to what it will be if you go back to the Tower. You forget how much pain she is enduring to avoid that very suffering. If you care for my mistress, sir, add no weight to the burden she already carries. Remain here, as she desires. You can be of no service down there. I implore you to be considerate."

It was an eloquent appeal, and it struck home. Lorry wavered, but his resolution would not weaken. He argued, first with Quinnox, then with himself, finally returning to the reckless determination to brave all and save her from herself. The soldier begged him to listen to reason, implored him to re-

consider, at last turning in anger upon the stubborn American with a torrent of maledictions. Lorry heard him through, and quietly, unswervingly announced that he was ready to leave the monastery at any time his guide cared to depart. Quinnox gave up in despair at this, gazing hopelessly at the man he had sworn to protect, who insisted on placing his head in the lion's jaw. He sat down at the window and murmured dejectedly:

"What will she say to me—what will she say to me?"

"I shall exonerate you, captain. She can have no fault to find with your action after I have told her how loyal you are and how—how—well, how unreasonable I am," said Lorry, kindly.

"You may never live to tell her this, sir. Then what is to become of me? I could not look her in the face again. I could only die!"

"Don't be so faint-hearted, Quinnox!" cried Lorry, stimulated by the desire to be with her, recognizing no obstacle that might thwart him in the effort. "We'll get through, safe and sound, and we'll untangle a few complications before we reach the end of the book. Brace up, for God's sake, for mine, for hers, for your own. I must get to her before everything is lost. My God, the fear that she may marry Gabriel will drive me mad if I am left here another night. Come! Let us prepare to start. We must notify the Abbot that I am to go.

I can be ready in five minutes. Ye Gods, think of what she may be sacrificing for me!"

The distracted captain gloomily watched the nervous preparations for departure, seeing his own disgrace ahead as plainly as if it had already come upon him. Lorry soon was attired in the guard's uniform he had worn from the Tower a month before. His pistol was in his pocket, and the bunch of violets she had sent to him that very night was pinned defiantly above his heart. Quinnox smiled when he observed this bit of sentiment, and grimly informed him that he was committing an act prohibited in Dangloss's disciplinary rules. Officers on duty were not to wear nosegays.

"Dangloss will not see my violets. By the way, the moon shines brightly, doesn't it?"

"It is almost as light as day. Our trip is made extremely hazardous for that reason. I am sorely afraid, rash sir, that we cannot reach the castle unseen."

"We must go about it boldly, that's all."

"Has it occurred to you, sir, that you are placing me in a terrible position? What excuse can I have, a captain of the guard, for slinking about at night with a man whom I am supposed to be tracking to earth? Discovery will brand me as a traitor. I cannot deny the charge without exposing Her Royal Highness."

Lorry turned cold. He had not thought of this

alarming possibility. But his ready wit came again to his relief, and with bright, confident eyes he swept away the obstacle.

"If discovered, you are at once to proclaim me a prisoner, take the credit for having caught me, and claim the reward."

"In that case, you will not go to the castle, but to the Tower."

"Not if you obey orders. The offer of reward says that I must be delivered to the undersigned. You will take me to her and not to the Tower."

Quinnox smiled and threw up his hands, as if unable to combat the quick logic of his companion. Together they made their way to the prior's cell, afterward to the Abbot's apartment. It was barely eleven o'clock and he had not retired. He questioned Quinnox closely, bade Lorry farewell and blessed him, sent his benediction to the Princess and ordered them conducted to the gates.

Ten minutes later they stood outside the wall, the great gates having been closed sharply behind them. Above them hung the silvery moon, full and bright, throwing its refulgent splendor over the mountain top with all the brilliancy of day. Never had Lorry seen the moon so accursedly bright.

"'Gad, it is like day," he exclaimed.

"As I told you, sir," agreed the other, reproof in his voice.

"We must wait until the moon goes down. It

won't do to risk it now. Can we not go somewhere to keep warm for an hour or so?"

"There is a cave farther down the mountain. Shall we take the chance of reaching it?"

"By all means. I can't endure the cold after being cooped up for so long."

They followed the winding road for some distance down the mountain, coming at last to a point where a small path branched off. It was the path leading down the side of the steep overlooking the city, and upon that side no wagon-road could be built. Seven thousand feet below stretched the sleeping, moon-lit city. Standing out on the brow of the mountain, they seemed to be the only living objects in the world. There was no sign of life above, below or beside them.

"How long should we be in making the descent?" asked Lorry, a sort of terror possessing him as he looked from the dizzy height into the ghost-like dimness below.

"Three hours, if you are strong."

"And how are we to get into the castle? I hadn't thought of that."

"There is a secret entrance," said Quinnox, maliciously enjoying the insistent one's acknowledgment of weakness. "If we reach it safely, I can take you underground to the old dungeons beneath the castle. It may be some time before you can enter the halls above, for the secret of that passage

is guarded jealously. There are but five people who know of its existence."

"Great confidence is placed in you, I see, and worthily, I am sure. How is it that you are trusted so implicitly?"

"I inherit the confidence. The captain of the guard is born to his position. My ancestors held the place before me, and not one betrayed the trust. The first-born in the last ten generations has been the captain of the guard in the royal palace, possessing all its secrets. I shall be the first to betray the trust—and for a man who is nothing to me."

"I suppose you consider me selfish and vile for placing you in this position," said Lorry, somewhat contritely.

"No; I have begun the task and I will complete it, come what may," answered the captain, firmly. "You are the only being in the world for whom I would sacrifice my honor voluntarily,—save one."

"I have wondered why you were never tempted to turn traitor to the Princess and claim the fortune that is represented in the reward."

"Not for five million gavvos, sir!"

"By George, you are a faithful lot! Dangloss, Allode and Ogbot and yourself, four honest men to whom she trusts her life, her honor. You belong to a rare species, and I am proud to know you."

The stealthy couple found the cave and spent an hour or more within its walls, sallying forth after

the tardy darkness had crept down over the mountain and into the peaceful valley. Then began the tortuous descent. Quinnox in the lead, they walked, crawled and ran down the narrow path, bruised, scratched and aching by the time they reached the topmost of the summer houses along the face of the mountain. After this, walking was easier, but stealthiness made their progress slow. Frequently, as they neared the base, they were obliged to dodge behind houses or to drop into the ditches by the roadside in order to avoid patroling police guards or Axphain sleuth-hounds. Lorry marveled at the vigil the soldiers were keeping, and was somewhat surprised to learn from the young captain that prevailing opinion located him in or near the city. For this reason, while other men were scouring Vienna, Paris and even London, hordes of vengeful men searched day and night for a clue in the city of Edelweiss.

The fugitive began to realize how determined was the effort to capture him and how small the chance of acquittal if he were taken. To his fevered imagination the enmity of the whole world was shaping itself against him. The air was charged with hatred, the ground with vengeance, the trees and rocks with denouncing shadows, while from the darkness behind merciless hands seemed to be stretching forth to clutch him. One simple, loyal love stood alone antagonistic to the universal desire to crush and kill.

A fragile woman was shielding him sturdily, unwaveringly against all these mighty forces. His heart thrilled with devotion; his arm tingled with the joy of clasping her once more to his breast; his wistful eyes hung upon the flickering light far off in the west. Quinnox had pointed it out to him, saying that it burned in the bedchamber of the Princess Yetive. Since the memorable night that took him to the cell in St. Valentine's, this light had burned from dusk to daylight. Lovingly, faithfully it had shone for him through all those dreary nights, a lonely signal from one heart to another.

At last, stiff and sore, they stole into the narrow streets of Edelweiss. Lorry glanced back and shivered, although the air was warm and balmy. He had truly been out of the world. Not until this instant did he fully appreciate the dread that possesses a man who is being hunted down by tireless foes; never did man's heart go out in gratitude and trustfulness as did his toward the strong defender whose sinewy arm he clasped as if in terror.

"You understand what this means to me," said Quinnox, gravely, as they paused to rest. "She will call me your murderer and curse me for my miserable treason. I am the first to dishonor the name of Quinnox."

XXII

GRENFALL LORRY'S FOE

The Princess Yetive had not flinched a hair's breadth from the resolution formed on that stormy night when she sacrificed pride and duty on the altar of love and justice. Prince Bolaroz's ultimatum overwhelmed her, but she arose from the wreckage that was strewn about her conscience and remained loyal, steadfast and true to the man in the monastery. To save his life was all she could hope to accomplish, and that she was bound to do at any cost. She could be nothing to him—not even friend. So long as he lived he would be considered the murderer of Lorenz, and until the end a price would hang over his head. She, Princess of Graustark, had offered a reward for him. For that reason he was always to be a fugitive, and she, least of all, could hope to see him. There had been a brief, happy dream, but it was swept away by the unrelenting rush of reality. The mere fact that she, and she alone, was responsible for his flight placed between them an unsurmountable barrier.

Clinging tenaciously to her purpose, she was still cognizant of the debt she owed the trusting, loving

people of Graustark. One word from her could avert the calamity that was to fall with the dawn of the fatal twentieth. All Graustark blindly trusted and adored her; to undeceive them would be to administer a shock from which they could never recover.

Her heart was bursting with love for Lorry; her mind was overflowing with tender thoughts that could not be sent to him, much as she trusted to the honor of Quinnox, her messenger. Hour after hour she sat in her window and marveled at the change that had been wrought in her life by this strong American, her eyes fixed on the faraway monastery, her heart still and cold and fearful. She had no confidant in this miserable affair of her heart. Others, near or dear, had surmised, but no word of hers confirmed. A diffidence, strange and proud, forbade the confession of her frailty, sweet, pure and womanly though it was. She could not forget that she was a Princess.

The Countess Dagmar was piqued by her reticence and sought in manifold ways to draw forth the voluntary avowal, with its divine tears and blushes. Harry Anguish, who spent much of his time at the castle and who invariably deserted his guards at the portals, was as eager as the Countess to have her commit herself irretrievably by word or sign, but he, too, was disappointed. He was, also, considerably puzzled. Her Highness's manner was

at all times frank and untroubled. She was apparently light-hearted; her cheeks had lost none of their freshness; her eyes were bright; her smile was quick and merry; her wit unclouded. Receptions, drawing-rooms and State functions found her always vivacious, so much so that her court wondered not a little. Daily reports brought no news of the fugitive, but while others were beginning to acquire a haggard air of worry and uncertainty, she was calmly resigned. The fifteenth, the sixteenth, the seventeenth, the eighteenth and now the nineteenth of November came, and still the Princess revealed no marked sign of distress. Could they have seen her in the privacy of her chamber on those dreary, maddening nights they would not have known their sovereign.

Heavy-hearted and with bowed heads the people of Graustark saw the nineteenth fade in the night, the breaking of which would bring the crush of pride, the end of power. At court there was the silent dread and the dying hope that relief might come at the last hour. Men, with pale faces and tearful eyes, wandered through the ancient castle, speechless, nerveless, miserable. Brave soldiers crept about, shorn of pride and filled with woe Citizens sat and stared aimlessly for hours, thinking of naught but the disaster so near at hand and so unavoidable. The whole nation surged as if in the last throes of death. To-morrow the potency of

Graustark was to die, its domain was to be cleft in twain,—disgraced before the world.

And, on the throne of this afflicted land sat the girl, proud, tender, courageous Yetive. To all Graustark she was its greatest, its most devoted sufferer; upon her the blow fell heaviest. There she sat, merciful and merciless, her slim white hand ready to sign the shameful deed in transfer, ready to sell her kingdom for her love. Beneath her throne, beneath her feet, cowered six souls, possessors of the secret. Of all the people in the world, they alone knew the heart of the Princess Yetive, they alone felt with her the weight of the sacrifice. With wistful eyes, fainting hearts and voiceless lips, five of them watched the day approach, knowing that she would not speak and that Graustark was doomed. Loyal conspirators against that which they loved better than their lives—their country—were Dangloss, Quinnox, Allode, Ogbot and Dagmar. Tomorrow would see the north torn from the south, the division of families, the rending of homes, the bursting of hearts. She sanctioned all this because she loved him and because he had done no wrong

Aware of her financial troubles and pursuing the advantage that his rival's death had opened to him, Prince Gabriel, of Dawsbergen, renewed his ardent suit. Scarce had the body of the murdered Prince left the domain before he made his presence marked. She was compelled to receive his visits, distasteful

as they were, but she would not hear his propositions. Knowing that he was in truth the mysterious Michael who had planned her abduction, she feared and despised him, yet dared make no public denunciation. As Dawsbergen was too powerful to be antagonized at this critical time, she was constantly forced to submit to the most trying and repulsive of ordeals. Tact and policy were required to control the violent, hot-blooded young ruler from the South. At times she despaired and longed for the quiet of the tomb; at other times she was consumed by the fires of resentment, rebelling against the ignominy to which she was subjected. Worse than all to her were the insolent overtures of Gabriel. How she endured she could not tell. The tears of humiliation shed after his departure on the occasion of each visit revealed the bitterness that was torturing this proud martyr.

He had come at once to renew his offer of a loan, knowing her helplessness. Day after day he haunted the castle, persistent in his efforts to induce her to accept his proposition. So fierce was his passion, so implacable his desire, that he went among the people of Edelweiss, presenting to them his proposal, hoping thereby to add public feeling to his claims. He tried to organize a committee of citizens to go before the Princess with the petition that his offer be accepted and the country saved. But Graustark was loyal to its Princess. Not one of her citizens listened to the wily Prince, and more than

one told him or his emissaries that the loss of the whole kingdom was preferable to the marriage he desired. The city sickened at the thought.

His last and master-stroke in the struggle to persuade came on the afternoon of the nineteenth, at an hour when all Edelweiss was in gloom and when the Princess was taxed to the point where the mask of courage was so frail that she could scarce hide her bleeding soul behind it.

Bolaroz of Axphain, to quote from the news-despatch, was in Edelweiss, a guest, with a few of his lords, in the castle. North of the city were encamped five thousand men. He had come prepared to cancel the little obligation of fifteen years' standing With the hated creditor in the castle, his influence hovering above the town, the populace, distracted by the thoughts of the day to come, Gabriel played what he considered his best card. He asked for and obtained a final interview with Yetive, not in her boudoir or her reception room, but in the throne room, where she was to meet Bolaroz in the morning.

The Princess, seated on her throne, awaited the approach of the resourceful, tenacious suitor. He came, and behind him strode eight stalwart men, bearing a long, iron-bound chest, the result of his effort with his bankers. Yetive and her nobles looked in surprise on this unusual performance. Dropping to his knee before the throne, Gabriel said, his voice trembling slightly with eagerness and fear,

"Your Highness, to-morrow will see the turning point in the history of two, possibly three nations—Graustark, Axphain and Dawsbergen. I have included my own land because its ruler is most vitally interested. He would serve and save Graustark, as you know, and he would satisfy Axphain. It is in my power to give you aid at this last, trying hour, and I implore you to listen to my words of sincerest friendship—yes, adoration. To-morrow you are to pay to Prince Bolaroz over twenty-five million gavvos or relinquish the entire north half of your domain. I understand the lamentable situation. You can raise no more than fifteen millions, and you are helpless. He will grant no extension of time. You know what I have proffered before. I come to-day to repeat my friendly offer and to give unquestioned bond as to my ability to carry it out. If you agree to accept the loan I extend, ten million gavvos for fifteen years at the usual rate of interest, you can on to-morrow morning place in the hand of Axphain when he makes his formal demand the full amount of your indebtedness in gold. Ricardo, open the chest!"

An attendant threw open the lid of the chest. It was filled with gold coins.

"This box contains one hundred thousand gavvos. There are in your halls nine boxes holding nine times as much as you see here. And there are nine

times as much all told on the way. This is an evidence of my good faith. Here is the gold. Pay Bolaroz and owe Gabriel, the greatest happiness that could come to him."

There was a dead silence after this theatrical action.

"The interest on this loan is not all you ask, I understand," said Halfont, slowly, his black eyes glittering. "You ask something that Graustark cannot and will not barter—the hand of its sovereign. If you are willing to make this loan, naming a fair rate of interest, withdrawing your proposal of marriage, we can come to an agreement."

Gabriel's eyes deadened with disappointment, his breast heaved and his fingers twitched.

"I have the happiness of your sovereign at heart as much as my own," he said. "She shall never want for devotion, she shall never know a pain."

"You are determined, then, to adhere to your original proposition?" demanded the Count.

"She would have married Lorenz to save her land, to protect her people. Am I not as good as Lorenz? Why not give——" began Gabriel, viciously, but Yetive arose, and, with gleaming eyes and flushing cheeks, interrupted him.

"Go! I will not hear you—not one word!"

He passed from the room without another word. Her court saw her standing straight and immovable, her white face transfigured.

XXIII

THE VISITOR AT MIDNIGHT

Below the castle and its distressed occupants, in a dark, damp little room, Grenfall Lorry lived a year in a day. On the night of the eighteenth, or rather near the break of dawn on the nineteenth, Captain Quinnox guided him from the dangerous streets of Edelweiss to the secret passage, and he was safe for the time being. The entrance to the passage was through a skilfully hidden opening in the wall that enclosed the park. A stone doorway, so cleverly constructed that it defied detection, led to a set of steps which, in turn, took one to a long, narrow passage. This ended in a stairway fully a quarter of a mile from its beginning. Ascending this stairway, one came to a secret panel, through which, by pressing a spring, the interior of the castle was reached. The location of the panel was in one of the recesses in the wall of the chapel, near the altar. It was in this chapel that Yetive exchanged her male attire for a loose gown, weeks before, and the servant who saw her come from the door at an unearthly hour in the morning believed she had gone

there to seek surcease from the troubles which oppressed her.

Lorry was impatient to rush forth from his place of hiding and to end all suspense, but Quinnox demurred. He begged the eager American to remain in the passage until the night of the nineteenth, when, all things going well, he might be so fortunate as to reach the Princess without being seen. It was the secret hope of the guilty captain that his charge could be induced by the Princess to return to the monastery, to avoid complications. He promised to inform Her Highness of his presence in the underground room and to arrange for a meeting. The miserable fellow could not find courage to confess his disobedience to his trusting mistress. Many times during the day she had seen him hovering near, approaching and then retreating, and had wondered not a little at his peculiar manner.

And so it was that Lorry chafed and writhed through a long day of suspense and agony. Quinnox had brought to the little room some candles, food and bedding, but he utilized only the former. The hours went by and no summons called him to her side. He was dying with the desire to hold her in his arms and to hear her voice again. Pacing to and fro like a caged animal, he recalled the ride in West Virginia, the scene in her bedchamber, the day in the throne room and, more delicious than all, the trip to the monastery. In his dreams, waking

or sleeping, he had seen the slim soldier, had heard the muffled voice, and had felt the womanly caresses. His brain now was in a whirl, busy with thoughts of love and fear, distraught with anxiety for her and for himself, bursting with the awful consequences of the hour that was upon them. What was to become of him? What was to be the end of this drama? What would the night, the morrow, bring about?

He looked back and saw himself as he was a year ago in Washington, before she came into his life, and then wondered if it could really be he who was going through these strange, improbable scenes, these sensations. It was nine o'clock in the evening when Quinnox returned to the little room. The waiting one had looked at his watch a hundred times, had run insanely up and down the passage in quest of the secret exit, had shouted aloud in the frenzy of desperation.

"Have you seen her?" he cried, grasping the newcomer's hand.

"I have, but, before God, I could not tell her what I had done. Your visit will be a surprise, I fear a shock."

"Then how am I to see her? Fool! Am I to wait here forever——"

"Have patience! I will take you to her to-night—aye, within an hour. To-morrow morning she signs away the northern provinces, and her instructions

are that she is not to be disturbed to-night. Not even will she see the Countess Dagmar after nine o'clock. It breaks my heart to see the sorrow that abounds in the castle to-night. Her Highness insists on being alone, and Bassot, the new guard, has orders to admit no one to her apartments. He is ill, and I have promised that a substitute shall relieve him at eleven o'clock. You are to be the substitute. Here is a part of an old uniform of mine, and here is a coat that belonged to Dannox, who was about your size. Please exchange the clothes you now have on for these. I apprehend no trouble in reaching her door, for the household is in gloom and the halls seem barren of life."

He threw the bundle on a chair and Lorry at once proceeded to don the contents. In a very short time he wore, instead of the cell keeper's garments, a neat-fitting uniform of the royal guard. He was trembling violently, chilled to the bone with nervousness, as they began the ascent of the stairs leading to the chapel. The crisis in his life, he felt, was near at hand.

Under the stealthy hand of Quinnox the panel opened and they listened intently for some moments. There was no one in the dimly lighted chapel, so they made their way to the door at the opposite end. The great organ looked down upon them and Lorry expected every instant to hear it burst forth in sounds of thunder. It seemed alive and watching

their movements reproachfully. Before unlocking the door, the captain pointed to a lance which stood against the wall near by.

"You are to carry that lance," he said, briefly. Then he cautiously peered forth. A moment later they were in the broad hall, boldly striding toward the distant stairway. Lorry had been instructed to proceed without the least sign of timidity. They passed several attendants in the hall and heard Count Halfont's voice in conversation with some one in an ante-room. As they neared the broad steps, who should come tripping down but Harry Anguish. He saluted Quinnox and walked rapidly down the corridor, evidently taking his departure after a call on the Countess.

"There goes your hostage," said the captain, grimly. It had required all of Lorry's self-possession to restrain the cry of joyful recognition. Up the staircase they went, meeting several ladies and gentlemen coming down, and were soon before the apartments of the Princess. A tall guard stood in front of the boudoir door.

"This is your relief, Bassot. You may go," said Quinnox, and, with a careless glance at the strange soldier, the sick man trudged off down the hall, glad to seek his bed.

"Is she there?" whispered Lorry, dizzy and faint with expectancy.

"Yes. This may mean your death and mine, sir,

but you would do it. Will you explain to her how I came to play her false?"

"She shall know the truth, good friend."

"After I have gone twenty paces down the hall, do you rap on the door. She may not admit you at first, but do not give up. If she bid you enter or asks your mission, enter quickly and close the door. It is unlocked. She may swoon, or scream, and you must prevent either, if possible. In an hour I shall return, and you must go back to the passage."

"Never! I have come to save her and her country, and I intend to do so by surrendering myself this very night."

"I had hoped to dissuade you. But, sir, you cannot do so to-night. You forget that this visit compromises her."

"True. I had forgotten. Well, I'll go back with you, but to-morrow I am your prisoner, not your friend."

"Be careful," cautioned the captain, as he moved away. Lorry feverishly tapped his knuckles on the panel of the door and waited with motionless heart for the response. It came not, and he rapped harder a strange fear darting into his mind.

"Well?" came from within, the voice he adored.

Impetuous haste marked his next movement. He dashed open the door, sprang inside and closed it quickly. She was sitting before her escritoire, writing, and looked up, surprised and annoyed.

"I was not to be disturbed—oh, God!"

She staggered to her feet and was in his arms before the breath of her exclamation had died away. Had he not supported her she would have dropped to the floor. Her hands, her face were like ice, her breast was pulseless and there was the wildest terror in her eyes.

"My darling—my queen!" he cried, passionately. "At last I am with you. Don't look at me like that! It is really I—I could not stay away—I could not permit this sacrifice of yours. Speak to me! Do not stare like that!"

Her wide blue eyes slowly swept his face, piteous wonder and doubt struggling in their depths.

"Am I awake?" she murmured, touching his face with her bewildered, questioning hands. "Is it truly you?" A smile illumined her face, but her joy was short-lived. An expression of terror came to her eyes and there was agony in the fingers that clasped his arm. "Why do you come here?" she cried. "It is madness! How and why came you to this room?"

He laughed like a delighted boy and hastily narrated the events of the past twenty-four hours, ending with the trick that gave him entrance to her room.

"And all this to see me?" she whispered.

"To see you and to save you. I hear that Gabriel has been annoying you and that you are to give up

half of the kingdom to-morrow. Tell me everything. It is another reason for my coming."

Sitting beside him on the divan, she told of Gabriel's visit and his dismisal, the outlook for the next day, and then sought to convince him of the happiness it afforded her to protect him from an undeserved death. He obtained for Quinnox the royal pardon and lauded him to the skies. So ravishing were the moments, so ecstatic the sensations, that possessed them that neither thought of the consequences if he were to be discovered in her room, disguised as one of her guardsmen. He forgot the real import of his reckless visit until she commanded him to stand erect before her that she might see what manner of soldier he was. With a laugh he leaped to his feet and stood before her—attention! She leaned back among the cushions and surveyed him through the glowing, impassioned eyes which slowly closed as if to shut out temptation.

"You are a perfect soldier," she said, her lashes parting ever so slightly.

"No more perfect than you," he cried. She remembered, with confusion, her own masquerading, but it was unkind of him to remember it. Her allusion to his uniform turned his thoughts into the channel through which they had been surging so turbulently up to the moment that found him tapping at her door. He had not told her of his deter-

mination, and the task grew harder as he saw the sparkle glow brighter and brighter in her eye.

"You are a brave soldier, then," she substituted. "It required courage to come to Edelweiss with hundreds of men ready to seize you at sight,—a pack of bloodhounds."

"I should have been a miserable coward to stay up there while you are so bravely facing disaster alone down here. I came to help you, as I should."

"But you can do nothing, dear, and you only make matters worse by coming to me. I have fought so hard to overcome the desire to be near you; I have struggled against myself for days and days, and I had won the battle when you came to pull my walls of strength down about my ears. Look! On my desk is a letter I was writing to you. No; you shall not read it! No one shall ever know what it contains." She darted to the desk, snatched up the sheets of paper and held them over the waxed taper. He stood in the middle of the room, a feeling of intense desolation settling down upon him. How could he lose this woman?

"To-morrow night Quinnox is to take you from the monastery and conduct you to a distant city. It has been all planned. Your friend, Mr. Anguish, is to meet you in three days, and you are to hurry to America by way of Athens. This was a letter to you. In it I said many things and was trying to write farewell when you came to this room. Do

you wonder that I was overcome with doubt and amazement—yes, and horror? Ach, what peril you are in here! Every minute may bring discovery, and that would mean death to you. You are innocent, but nothing could save you. The proof is too strong. Mizrox has found a man who swears he saw you enter Lorenz's room."

"What a damnable lie!" cried Lorry, lightly. "I was not near his room!"

"But you can see what means they will adopt to convict you. You are doomed if caught, by my men or theirs. I cannot save you again. You know now that I love you. I would not give away half of the land that my forefathers ruled were it not true. Bolaroz would be glad to grant ten years of grace could he but have you in his clutches. And, to see me, you would run the risk of undoing all that I have planned, accomplished and suffered for. Could you not have been content with that last good-bye at the monastery? It is cruel to both of us—to me especially—that we must have the parting again." She had gone to the divan and now dropped limply among the cushions, resting her head on her hand.

"I was determined to see you," he said. "They shall not kill me nor are you to sacrifice your father's domain. Worse than all, I feared that you might yield to Gabriel——"

"Ach! You insult me when you say that! I yielded to Lorenz because I thought it my duty and

because I dared not admit to myself that I loved you. But Gabriel! Ach!" she cried, soulfully. "Grenfall Lorry, I shall marry no man. You I love, but you I cannot marry. It is folly to dream of it, even as a possibility. When you go from Graustark to-morrow night you take my heart, my life, my soul with you. I shall never see you again —God help me to say this—I shall never allow you to see me again. I tell you I could not bear it. The weakest and the strongest of God's creations is woman." She started suddenly, half rising. "Did any one see you come to my room? Was Quinnox sure?"

"We passed people, but no one knew me. I will go if you are distressed over my being here."

"It is not that—not that. Some spy may have seen you. I have a strange fear that they suspect me and that I am being watched. Where is Captain Quinnox?"

"He said he would return for me in an hour. The time is almost gone. How it has flown! Yetive, Yetive, I will not give you up!" he cried, sinking to his knees before her.

"You must—you shall! You must go back to the monastery to-night! Oh, how I pray that you may reach it in safety! And, you must leave this wretched country at once. Will you see if Quinnox is outside the door? Be quick! I am mad with the fear

that you may be found here—that you may be taken before you can return to St. Valentine's."

He arose and stood looking down at the intense face, all aquiver with the battle between temptation and solicitude.

"I am not going back to St. Valentine's," he said slowly.

"But it is all arranged for you to start from there to-morrow. You cannot escape the city guard except through St. Valentine's."

"Yetive, has it not occurred to you that I may not wish to escape the city guard?"

"May not wish to escape the—what do you mean?" she cried, bewildered.

"I am not going to leave Edelweiss, dearest. It is my intention to surrender myself to the authorities."

She gazed at him in horror for a moment and then fell back with a low moan.

"For God's sake, do not say that!" she wailed. "I forbid you to think of it. You cannot do this after all I have done to save you. Ach, you are jesting; I should have known."

He sat down and drew her to his side. Some moments passed before he could speak.

"I cannot and will not permit you to make such a sacrifice for me. The proposition of Bolaroz is known to me. If you produce me for trial you are to have a ten years' extension. My duty is plain.

I am no cowardly criminal, and I am not afraid to face my accusers. At the worst, I can die but once."

"Die but once," she repeated, as if in a dream.

"I came here to tell you of my decision, to ask you to save your lands, protect your people, and to remember that I would die a thousand times to serve you and yours."

"After all I have done—after all I have done," she murmured, piteously. "No, no! You shall not! You are more to me than all my kingdom, than all the people in the world. You have made me love you, you have caused me to detest the throne which separates us, you have made me pray that I might be a pauper, but you shall not force me to destroy the mite of hope that lingers in my heart. You shall not crush the hope that there may be a—a—some day!"

"A some day? Some day when you will be mine?" he cried.

"I will not say that, but, for my sake,—for my sake,—go away from this place. Save yourself! You are all I have to live for." Her arms were about his neck and her imploring words went to his heart like great thrusts of pain.

"You forget the thousands who love and trust you. Do they deserve to be wronged?"

"No, no,—ach, God, how I have suffered because of them! I have betrayed them, have stolen their rights and made them a nation of beggars. But I

would not, for all this nation, have an innocent man condemned—nor could my people ask that of me. You cannot dissuade me. It must be as I wish Oh, why does not Quinnox come for you!" She arose and paced the floor distractedly.

He was revolving a selfish, cowardly capitulation to love and injustice, when a sharp tap was heard at the door. Leaping to his feet, he whispered:

"Quinnox! He has come for me. Now to get out of your room without being seen!"

The Princess Yetive ran to him, and, placing her hands on his shoulders, cried with the fierceness of despair:

"You will go back to the monastery? You will leave Graustark? For my sake—for my sake!"

He hesitated and then surrendered, his honor falling weak and faint by the pathway of passion.

"Yes!" he cried, hoarsely.

Tap! tap! tap! at the door. Lorry took one look at the rapturous face and released her.

"Come!" she called.

The door flew open, an attendant saluted, and in stepped—Gabriel!

XXIV

OFF TO THE DUNGEON

The tableau lasted but a moment. Gabriel advanced a few steps, his eyes gleaming with jealousy and triumph. Before him stood the petrified lovers, caught red-handed. Through her dazed brain struggled the conviction that he could never escape; through his ran the miserable realization that he had ruined her forever. Gabriel, of all men!

"I arrive inopportunely," he said, harshly, the veins standing out on his neck and temples. "Do I intrude? I was not aware that you expected two, Your Highness!" There was no mistaking his meaning. He viciously sought to convey the impression that he was there by appointment, a clandestine visitor in her apartments at midnight.

"What do you mean by coming to my apartment at this hour?" she stammered, trying to rescue dignity from the chaos of emotions. Lorry was standing slightly to the right and several feet behind her. He understood the Prince, and quickly sought to interpose with the hope that he might shield her from the sting.

"She did not expect me, sir," he said, and a men-

acing gleam came to his eyes. His pistol was in his hand. Gabriel saw it, but the staring Princess did not. She could not take her eyes from the face of the intruder. "Now, may I ask you why you are here?"

Gabriel's wit saved him from death. He saw that he could not pursue the course he had begun, for there was murder in the American's eye. Like a fox he swerved, and, with a servile promise of submission in his glance, he said:

"I thought you were here, my fine fellow, and I came to satisfy myself. Now, sir, may I ask why you are here?" His fingers twitched and his eyes were glassy with the malevolence he was subduing.

"I am here as a prisoner," said Lorry, boldly. Gabriel laughed derisively.

"And how often have you come here in this manner as a prisoner? Midnight and alone in the apartments of the Princess! The guard dismissed! A prisoner, eh? Ha, what a prison!"

"Stop!" cried Lorry, white to the lips.

The Princess was beginning to understand. Her eyes grew wide with horror, her figure straightened imperiously and the white in her cheeks gave way to the red of insulted virtue.

"I see it all! You have not been outside this castle since you left the prison. A pretty scheme! You could not marry him, could you, eh? He is not a Prince! But you could bring him here and hide

him where no one would dare to think of looking for him—in your apartments——"

With a snarl of rage, Lorry sprang upon him, cutting short the sentence that would have gone through her like the keenest knife-blade.

"Liar! Dog! I'll kill you for that!" he cried, but, before he could clutch the Prince's throat, Yetive had frantically seized his arm.

"Not that!" she shrieked. "Do not kill him! There must be no murder here!"

He reluctantly hurled Gabriel from him, the Prince tottering to his knees in the effort to keep from falling. She had saved her maligner's life, but courage deserted her with the act. Helplessly she looked into the blazing eyes of her lover and faltered:

"I—I do not know what to say or do. My brain is bursting!"

"Courage, courage!" he whispered, gently.

"You shall pay for this," shrieked Gabriel. "If you are not a prisoner you shall be. There'll be scandal enough in Graustark to-morrow to start a volcano of wrath from the royal tombs where lie her fathers. I'll see that you *are* a prisoner!" He started for the door, but Lorry's pistol was leveled at his head.

"If you move I'll kill you!"

"The world will understand how and why I fell by your hand in this room. Shoot!" he cried, tri-

umphantly. Lorry's hand trembled and his eyes filled with the tears of impotent rage. The Prince held the higher card.

A face suddenly appeared at the door, which had been stealthily opened from without. Captain Quinnox glided into the room behind the Prince and gently closed the door, unnoticed by the gloater.

"A prisoner?" sneered Gabriel. "Where is your captor, pray?"

"Here!" answered a voice at his back. The Prince wheeled and found himself looking at the stalwart form of the captain of the guard. "I am surely privileged to speak now, Your Highness," he went on, addressing the Princess, significantly.

"How came you here?" gasped Gabriel.

"I brought my prisoner here. Where should I be if not here to guard him?"

"When—when did you enter this room?"

"An hour ago."

"You were not here when I came!"

"I have been standing on this spot for an hour. You have been very much excited, I'll agree, but it is strange you did not see me," lied Quinnox.

Gabriel looked about helplessly, nonplussed.

"You were here when I came in?" he asked, wonderingly.

"Ask Her Royal Highness," commanded the captain, smiling.

"Captain Quinnox brought the prisoner to me an hour ago," she said mechanically.

"It is a lie!" cried Gabriel. "He was not here when I entered!"

The captain of the guard laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the Prince and said, threateningly:

"I was here and I am here. Have a care how you speak. Were I to do right I should shoot you like a dog. You came like a thief, you insult the ruler of my land. I have borne it all because you are a Prince, but have a care—have a care. I may forget myself and tear out your black heart with these hands. One word from Her Royal Highness will be your death warrant."

He looked inquiringly at the Princess, as if anxious to put the dangerous witness where he could tell no tales. She shook her head, but did not speak. Lorry realized that the time had come for him to assert himself. Assuming a distressed air, he bowed his head and said, dejectedly:

"My pleading has been in vain, then, Your Highness. I have sworn to you that I am innocent of this murder, and you have said I shall have a fair trial. That is all you can offer?"

"That is all," she said, shrilly, her mind gradually grasping his meaning.

"You will not punish the poor people who secreted me in their house for weeks, for they are convinced of my innocence. Your captain here, who found

me in their house to-night, can also speak well of them. I have only this request to make, in return for what little service I may have given you: Forgive the old people who befriended me. I am ready to go to the Tower at once, captain."

Gabriel heard this speech with a skeptical smile on his face.

"I am no fool," he said, simply. "Captain," shrewdly turning to Quinnox, "if he is your prisoner, why do you permit him to retain his revolver?"

The conspirators were taken by surprise, but Lorry had found his wits.

"It is folly, Your Highness, to allow this gentleman and conquering Prince to cross-examine you. I am a prisoner, and that is the end of it. What odds is it to the Prince of Dawsbergen how and where I was caught or why your officer brought me to you?"

"You were ordered from my house once to-day, yet you come again like a conqueror. I should not spare you. You deserve to lose your life for the actions of to-night. Captain Quinnox, will you kill him if I ask you to end his wretched life?" Yetive's eyes were blazing with wrath, beneath which gleamed a hope that he could be frightened into silence.

"Willingly—willingly!" cried Quinnox. "Now, Your Highness? 'Twere better in the hall!"

"For God's sake, do not murder me! Let me go!" cringed the Prince.

"I do not mean that you should kill him now, Quinnox, but I instruct you to do so if he puts foot inside these walls again. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Then you will place this prisoner in the castle dungeon until to-morrow morning, when he is to be taken to the Tower. Prince Gabriel may accompany you to the dungeon cell, if he likes, after which you will escort him to the gates. If he enters them again you are to kill him. Take them both away!"

"Your Highness, I must ask you to write a pardon for the good people in whose house the prisoner was found," suggested Quinnox, shrewdly seeing a chance for communication unsuspected by the Prince.

"A moment, Your Highness," said the Prince, who had recovered himself cleverly. "I appreciate your position. I have made a serious charge, and I now have a fair proposition to suggest to you. If this man is not produced to-morrow morning, I take it for granted that I am at liberty to tell all that has happened in this room to-night. If he is produced, I shall kneel and beg your pardon."

The Princess turned paler than ever, and knew not how she kept from falling to the floor. There was a long silence following Gabriel's unexpected but fair suggestion.

"That is very fair, Your Highness," said Lorry. "There is no reason why I should not be a prisoner to-morrow. I don't see how I can hope to escape the inevitable. Your dungeon is strong and I have given my word of honor to the captain that I shall make no further effort to evade the law."

"I agree," murmured the Princess, ready to faint under the strain.

"I must see him delivered to Prince Bolaroz," added Gabriel, mercilessly.

"To Bolaroz," she repeated.

"Your Highness, the pardon for the poor old people," reminded Quinnox. She glided to the desk, stunned, bewildered. It seemed as though death were upon her. Quinnox followed, and bent near her ear. "Do not be alarmed," he whispered. "No one knows of Mr. Lorry's presence here, save the Prince, and if he dares to accuse you before Bolaroz our people will tear him to pieces. No one will believe him."

"You—you can save him, then?" she gasped, joyously.

"If he will permit me to do so. Write to him what you will, Your Highness, and he shall have the message. Be brave, and all will go well. Write quickly! This is supposed to be the pardon."

She wrote feverishly, a thousand thoughts arising for every one that she was able to transfer to the paper. When she had finished the hope-inspired

scrawl she arose and, with a gracious smile, handed to the waiting captain the pardon for those who had secreted the fugitive.

"I grant forgiveness to them gladly," she said.

"I thank you," said Lorry, bowing low.

"Mr. Lorry, I regret the difficulty in which you find yourself. It was on my account, too, I am told. Be you guilty or innocent, you are my friend, my protector. May God be good to you." She gave him her hand calmly, steadily, as if she were bestowing favor upon a subject. He kissed the hand gravely.

"Forgive me for trespassing on your good nature to-night, Your Highness."

"The five thousand gavvos shall be yours to-morrow, Captain Quinnox," she said, graciously. "You have done your duty well." The faithful captain bowed deep and low, and a weight was lifted from his conscience.

"Gentlemen, the door," he said, and, without a word, the trio left the room. She closed the door and stood like a statue until their footsteps died away in the distance. As one in a daze, she sat at the desk till the dawn, Grenfall Lorry's revolver lying before her.

Through the halls, down the stairs and into the clammy dungeon strode the silent trio. But before Lorry stepped inside the cell Gabriel asked a ques-

tion that had been troubling him for many minutes.

"I am afraid I have—ah—misjudged her——" muttered Gabriel, now convinced that he had committed himself irretrievably.

"You will find she has not misjudged you," said the prisoner, grimly. "Can't I have a candle in here, captain?"

"You may keep this lantern," said Quinnox, stepping inside the narrow cell. As he placed the lantern on the floor, he whispered: "I will return in an hour. Read this!" Lorry's hand closed over the bit of perfumed paper.

The Prince was now inside the cell, peering about curiously, even timorously. "By the way, Your Highness, how would you enjoy living in a hole like this all your life?"

"Horrible!" said Gabriel, shuddering like a leaf.

"Then take my advice: don't commit any murders. Hire some one else."

The two men eyed each other steadily for a moment or two. Then the Prince looked out of the cell, a mad desire to fly from some dreadful, unseen horror coming over him.

Quinnox locked the door, and, striking a match, bade His Highness precede him up the stone steps.

In the cell, the prisoner read and reread the incoherent message from Yetive:

"It is the only way. Quinnox will assist you

to escape to-night. Go, I implore you; as you love me, go. Your life is more than all to me. Gabriel's story will not be entertained and he can have no proof. He will be torn to pieces, Quinnox says. I do not know how I can live until I am certain you are safe. This will be the longest night a woman ever spent. If I could only be sure that you will do as I ask, as I beg and implore! Do not think of me, but save yourself. I would lose everything to save you."

He smiled sadly as he burned the "pardon." The concluding sentences swept away the last thought he might have had of leaving her to bear the consequences. "Do not think of me, but save yourself. I would lose everything to save you." He leaned against the stone wall and shook his head slowly, the smile still on his lips.

XXV

"BECAUSE I LOVE HIM"

The next morning Edelweiss was astir early. Great throngs of people flocked the streets long before the hour set for the signing of the decree that was to divide the north from the south. There were men and women from the mountains, from the southern valleys, from the plains to the north and east. Sullen were the mutterings, threatening the faces, resentful the hearts of those who crowded the shops, the public places and the streets. Before nine o'clock the great concourse of people began to push toward the castle. Castle Avenue was packed with the moving masses. Thousands upon thousands of this humbled race gathered outside the walls, waiting for news from the castle with the spark of hope that does not die until the very end, nursing the possibility that something might intervene at the last moment to save the country from disgrace and ruin.

A strong guard was required to keep the mob back from the gates, and the force of men on the wall had been quadrupled. Business in the city was suspended. The whole nation, it seemed, stood before the walls, awaiting, with bated breath and dis-

mal faces, the announcement that Yetive had deeded to Bolaroz the lands and lives of half of her subjects. The northern plainsmen who were so soon to acknowledge Axphain sovereignty, wept and wailed over their unhappy lot. Brothers and sisters from the south cursed and moaned in sympathy.

Shortly before nine o'clock, Harry Anguish with his guard of six, rode up to the castle. Captain Dangloss was beside him on his gray charger.

They had scarcely passed inside the gates when a cavalcade of mounted men came riding up the avenue from the Hotel Regengetz. Then the howling, the hissing, the hooting began. Maledictions were hurled at the heads of Axphain noblemen as they rode between the maddened lines of people. They smiled sardonically in reply to the impotent signs of hatred, but they were glad when the castle gates closed between them and the vast, despairing crowd, in which the tempest of revolt was brewing with unmistakable energy.

Prince Bolaroz, the Duke of Mizrox and the Ministers were already in the castle, and had been there since the previous afternoon. In the royal palace the excitement was intense, but it was of the subdued kind that strains the nerves to the point where control is martyrdom.

When the attendants went to the bedchamber of the Princess at seven o'clock, as was their wont, they found, to their surprise, no one standing guard.

The Princess was not in her chamber, nor had she been there during the night. The bed was undisturbed. In some alarm, the two women ran to her parlor, then to the boudoir. Here they found her asleep on the divan, attired in the gown she had worn since the evening before, now crumpled and creased, the proof positive of a restless, miserable night.

Her first act, after awakening and untangling the meshes in her throbbing, uncomprehending brain, was to send for Quinnox. She could scarcely wait for his appearance and the assurance that Lorry was safely out of danger. The footman who had been sent to fetch the captain was a long time in returning. She was dressed in her breakfast gown long before he came in with the report that the captain was nowhere to be found. Her heart gave a great throb of joy. She alone could explain his absence. To her it meant but one thing: Lorry's flight from the castle. Where else could Quinnox be except with the fugitive, perhaps once more inside St. Valentine's? With the great load of suspense off her mind, she cared not for the trials that still confronted her on that dreaded morning. She had saved him, and she was willing to pay the price.

Preparations began at once for the eventful transaction in the throne room. The splendor of two courts was to shine in rivalry. Ten o'clock was the hour set for the meeting of the two rulers, the victor

and the victim. Her nobles and her ladies, her Ministers, her guards and her lackeys moved about in the halls, dreading the hour, brushing against the hated Axphain guests. In one of the small waiting-rooms sat the Count and Countess Halfont, the latter in tears. The young Countess Dagmar stood at a window with Harry Anguish. The latter was flushed and nervous, and acted like a man who expects that which is unexpected by others. With a strange confidence in his voice, he sought to cheer his depressed friends, but the cheerfulness was not contagious. The sombreness of a burial hung over the castle.

Half an hour before the time set for the meeting in the throne room, Yetive sent for her uncle, her aunt and Dagmar. As Anguish and the latter followed, the girl turned her sad, puzzled eyes up to the face of the tall American, and asked:

"Are you rejoicing over our misfortune? You do not show a particle of regret. Do you forget that we are sacrificing a great deal to save the life of your friend? I do not understand how you can be so heartless."

"If you knew what I know you'd jump so high you could crack those pretty heels of yours together ten times before you touched the floor again," said he, warmly.

"Please tell me," she cried. "I knew there was something."

"But I'm afraid so high a jump would upset you for the day. You must wait awhile, Dagmar." It was the first time he had called her Dagmar, and she looked startled.

"I am not used to waiting," she said confusedly.

"I think I can explain satisfactorily when I have more time," he said, softly, in her ear, and, although she tried, she could find no words to continue. He left her at the head of the stairs, and did not see her again until she passed him in the throne room. Then she was pale, and brave, and trembling.

Prince Bolaroz and his nobles stood to the right of the throne, the Graustark men and women of degree to the left, while near the door, on both sides, were to be seen the leading military men of both principalities. Near the Duke of Mizrox was stationed the figure of Gabriel, Prince of Dawsbergen. He had come, with half a dozen followers, among a crowd of unsuspecting Axphainians, and had taken his position near the throne. Anguish entered with Baron Dangloss, and they stood together near the doorway, the latter whiter than he had ever been in his life.

Then came the hush of expectancy. The doors swung open, the curtains parted and the Princess entered.

She was supported by the arm of her tall uncle, Caspar of Halfont. Pages carried the train of her dress, a jeweled gown of black. As she advanced

to the throne, calm and stately, those assembled bent knee to the fairest woman the eye ever had looked upon.

The calm, proud exterior hid the most unhappy of hearts. The resolute courage with which her spirit had been braced for the occasion was remarkable in more ways than one. Among other inspirations behind the valiant show was the bravery of a guilty conscience. Her composure sustained a shock when she passed Allode at the door. That faithful, heart-broken servitor looked at her face with pleading, horror-struck eyes, as much as to say: "Good God, are you going to destroy Graustark for the sake of that murderer? Have pity on us—have pity!"

Before taking her seat on the throne, she swept the thrilled assemblage with her wide blue eyes. There were shadows beneath them and there were wells of tears behind them. As she looked upon the little knot of white-faced northern barons, her knees trembled and her heart gave a great throb of pity. Still the face was resolute. Then she saw Anguish and the suffering Dangloss; then the accusing, merciless eyes of Gabriel. At sight of him she started violently and an icy fear crept into her soul. Instinctively, she searched the gorgeous company for the captain of the guard. Her staunchest ally was not there. Was she to hear the condemning words alone? Would the people do as Quinnox had

prophesied, or would they believe Gabriel and curse her?

She sank into the great chair and sat with staring, helpless eyes, deserted and feeble.

At last, the whirling brain ended its flight and settled down to the issue first at hand—the transaction with Bolaroz. Summoning all her self-control, she said:

"You are come, most noble Bolaroz, to draw from us the price of our defeat. We are loyal to our compact, as you are to yours, sire. Yet, in the presence of my people and in the name of mercy and justice, I ask you to grant us respite. You are rich and powerful, we despoiled and struggling beneath a weight we can lift and displace if given a few short years in which to grow and gather strength. At this last hour in the fifteen years of our indebtedness, I sue in supplication for the leniency that you can so well accord. It is on the advice of my counsellors that I put away personal pride and national dignity to make this request, trusting to your goodness of heart. If you will not hearken to our petition for a renewal of negotiations, there is but one course open to Graustark. We can and will pay our debt of honor."

Bolaroz stood before her, dark and uncompromising. She saw the futility of her plea.

"I have not forgotten, most noble petitioner, that you are ruler here, not I. Therefore I am in no way

responsible for the conditions which confront you, except that I am an honest creditor, come for his honest dues. This is the twentieth of November. You have had fifteen years to accumulate enough to meet the requirements of this day. Should I suffer for your faults? There is in the treaty a provision which applies to an emergency of this kind. Your inability to liquidate in gold does not prevent the payment of this honest debt in land, as provided for in the sixth clause of the agreement. 'All that part of Graustark north of a line drawn directly from east to west between the provinces of Ganlook and Doswan, a tract comprising Doswan, Shellotz, Varagan, Oeswald, Sesmai and Gattabatton.' You have two alternatives, Your Highness. Produce the gold or sign the decree ceding to Axphain the lands stipulated in the treaty. I can grant no respite."

"You knew when that treaty was framed that we could raise no such funds in fifteen years," said Halfont, forgetting himself in his indignation. Gaspon and other men present approved his hasty declaration.

"Am I dealing with the Princess of Graustark or with you, sir?" asked Bolaroz, roughly.

"You are dealing with the people of Graustark, and among the poorest, I. I will sign the decree. There is nothing to be gained by appealing to you. The papers, Gaspon, quick! I would have this transaction finished speedily," cried the Princess, her

cheeks flushing and her eyes glowing from the flames of a burning conscience. The groan that went up from the northern nobles cut her like the slash of a knife.

"There was one other condition," said Bolaroz, hastily, unable to gloat as he had expected. "The recapture of the assassin who slew my son would have meant much to Graustark. It is unfortunate that your police department is so inefficient." Dangloss writhed beneath this thrust. Yetive's eyes went to him, for an instant, sorrowfully. Then they dropped to the fatal document which Gaspon had placed on the table before her. The lines ran together and were the color of blood. Unconsciously she took the pen in her nerveless fingers. A deep sob came from the breast of her gray old uncle, and Gaspon's hand shook like a leaf as he placed the seal of Graustark on the table, ready for use.

"The assassin's life could have saved you," went on Bolaroz, a vengeful glare coming to his eyes.

She looked up and her lips moved as if she would have spoken. No words came, no breath, it seemed to her. Casting a piteous, hunted glance over the faces before her, she bent forward and blindly touched the pen to the paper. The silence was that of death. Before she could make the first stroke, a harsh voice, in which there was combined triumph and amazement, broke the stillness like the clanging of a bell.

"Have you no honor?"

The pen dropped from her fingers as the expected condemnation came. Every eye in the house was turned toward the white, twitching face of Gabriel of Dawsbergen. He stood a little apart from his friends, his finger pointed throneward. The Princess stared at the nemesis-like figure for an instant, as if petrified. Then the pent-up fear crowded everything out of its path. In sheer desperation, her eyes flashing with the intensity of defiant guilt, bitter rage welling up against her persecutor, she half arose and cried:

"Who uttered those words? Speak!"

"I, Gabriel of Dawsbergen! Where is the prisoner, madam?" rang out the voice.

"The man is mad!" cried she, sinking back with a shudder.

"Mad, eh? Because I do as I did promise? Behold the queen of perfidy! Madam, I will be heard. Lorry is in this castle!"

"He is mad!" gasped Bolaroz, the first of the stunned spectators to find his tongue.

There was a commotion near the door. Voices were heard outside.

"You have been duped!" insisted Gabriel, taking several steps toward the throne. "Your idol is a traitress, a deceiver! I say he is here! She has seen him. Let her sign that decree if she dares! I com-

mand you, Yetive of Graustark, to produce this criminal!"

The impulse to crush the defiler was checked by the sudden appearance of two men inside the curtains.

"He is here!" cried a strong voice, and Lorry, breathless and haggard, pushed through the astonished crowd, followed by Captain Quinnox, upon whose ghastly face there were bloodstains.

A shout went up from those assembled, a shout of joy. The faces of Dangloss and Allode were pictures of astonishment and—it must be said—relief. Harry Anguish staggered but recovered himself instantly, and turned his eyes toward Gabriel. That worthy's legs trembled and his jaw dropped.

"I have the prisoner, Your Highness," said Quinnox, in hoarse, discordant tones. He stood before the throne with his captive, but dared not look his mistress in the face. As they stood there the story of the night just passed was told by the condition of the two men. There had been a struggle for supremacy in the dungeon and the prisoner had won. The one had tried to hold the other to the dungeon's safety, after his refusal to leave the castle, and the other had fought his way to the halls above. It was then that Quinnox had wit enough to change front and drag his prisoner to the place which, most of all, he had wished to avoid.

"The prisoner!" shouted the northern nobles, and in an instant the solemn throne room was wild with excitement.

"Do not sign that decree!" cried some one from a far corner.

"Here is your man, Prince Bolaroz!" cried a baron.

"Quinnox has saved us!" shouted another.

The Princess, white as death and as motionless, sat bolt upright in her royal seat.

"Oh!" she moaned, piteously, and, clenching her hands, she carried them to her eyes as if to shut out the sight. The Countess Halfont and Dagmar ran to her side, the latter frantic with alarm. She knew more than the others.

"Are you the fugitive?" cried Bolaroz.

"I am Grenfall Lorry. Are you Bolaroz?"

"The father of the man you murdered. Ah, this is rapture!"

"I have only to say to Your Highness, I did not kill your son. I swear it, so help me God!"

"Your Highness," cried Bolaroz, stepping to the throne, "destroy that decree. This brave soldier has saved Graustark. In an hour your ministers and mine will have drawn up a ten years' extension of time, in proper form, to which my signature shall be gladly attached. I have not forgotten my promise."

Yetive straightened suddenly, seized the pen and

fiercely began to sign the decree, in spite of all and before those about her fairly realized her intention. Lorry understood, and was the first to snatch the document from her hands. A half-written Yetive, a blot and a long, spluttering scratch of the pen told how near she had come to signing away the lands of Graustark, forgetful of the fact that it could be of no benefit to the prisoner she loved.

"Yetive!" gasped her uncle, in horror.

"She would have signed," cried Gaspon, in wonder and alarm.

"Yes, I would have signed!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet, strong and defiant. "I could not have saved his life, perhaps, but I might have saved him from the cruel injustice that that man's vengeance would have invented. He is innocent, and I would give my kingdom to stay the wrong that will be done."

"What! You defend the dog!" cried Bolaroz. "Seize him, men! I will see that justice is done. It is no girl he has to deal with now."

"Stop!" cried the Princess, the command checking the men. Quinnox leaped in front of his charge. "He is my prisoner, and he shall have justice. Keep back your soldiery, Prince Bolaroz. It is a girl you have to deal with. I will say to you all, my people and yours, that I believe him to be innocent and that I sincerely regret his capture, fortunate as it may be

for us. He shall have a fair and a just trial, and I shall do all in my power, Prince Bolaroz, to secure his acquittal."

"Why do you take this stand, Yetive? Why have you tried to shield him?" cried the heart-broken Halfont.

She drew herself to her full height, and, sweeping the threatening crowd with a challenge in her eyes cried, the tones ringing strong and clear above the growing tumult:

"Because I love him!"

As if by magic the room became suddenly still.

"Behold an honest man. I would have saved him at the cost of my honor. Scorn me if you will, but listen to this. The man who stands here accused came voluntarily to this castle, surrendering himself to Captain Quinnox, that he might, though innocent, stand between us and disaster. He was safe from our pursuit, yet returned, perhaps to his death. For me, for you and for Graustark he has done this. Is there a man among you who would have done as much for his own country? Yet he does this for a country to which he is a stranger. I must commit him to prison once more. But," she cried in sudden fierceness, "I promise him now, before the trial, a royal pardon. Do I make my meaning clear to you, Prince Bolaroz?"

The white lips of the old Prince could frame no reply to this daring speech.

"Be careful what you say, Your Highness," cried the prisoner, hastily. "I must refuse to accept a pardon at the cost of your honor. It is because I love you better than my life that I stand here. I cannot allow you and your people to suffer when it is in my power to prevent it. All that I can ask is fairness and justice. I am not guilty, and God will protect me. Prince Bolaroz, I call upon you to keep your promise. I am not the slayer of your son, but I am the man you would send to the block, guilty or innocent."

As he spoke, the Princess dropped back in the chair, her rash courage gone. A stir near the doorway followed his concluding sentence, and the other American stepped forward, his face showing his excitement.

"Your Highness," he said, "I should have spoken sooner. My lips were parted and ready to cry out when Prince Gabriel interposed and prevented the signing of the decree. Grenfall Lorry did not kill the young Prince. I can produce the guilty man!"

XXVI

THE GUESSING OF ANGUISH

The startling assertion created a fresh sensation. Sensations had come so thick and so fast, however, that they seemed component parts of one grand bewildering climax. The new actor in the drama held the center of the stage undisputed.

"Harry!" cried Lorry.

"Prince Gabriel, why do you shake like a leaf? Is it because you know what I am going to say?" exclaimed Anguish, pointing his finger accusingly at the astonished Prince of Dawsbergen.

Gabriel's lips parted, but nothing more than a gasp escaped them. Involuntarily his eyes sought the door, then the windows, the peculiar, uncontrollable look of the hunted coming into them. Bolaroz allowed his gaze to leap instantly to that pallid face and every eye in the room followed. Yetive was standing again, her face glowing.

"An accomplice has confessed all. I have the word of the man who saw the crime committed. I charge Prince Gabriel with the murder of His Highness, Prince Lorenz."

With a groan, Gabriel threw his hands to his heart and tottered forward, glaring at the merciless face of the accuser.

"Confessed! Betrayed!" he faltered. Then he whirled like a maniac upon his little coterie of followers. "Vile traitor!" he shrieked, "I will drink your heart's blood!"

With a howl he leaped toward one of the men, a dark-faced nobleman named Berrowag. The latter evaded him and rushed toward the door, crying:

"It is a lie! a lie! He has tricked you! I did not confess!"

The Prince was seized by his friends, struggling and cursing. A peculiar smile lit up the face of Harry Anguish.

"I repeat, he is the assassin!"

Gabriel broke from the detaining hands and drawing a revolver, rushed for the door.

"Out of the way! I will not be taken alive!"

Allode met him at the curtains and grasped him in his powerful arms, Baron Dangloss and others tearing the weapon from his hand. The utmost confusion reigned—women screaming, men shouting—and above all could be heard the howls of the accused Prince.

"Let me go! Curse you! Curse you! I will not surrender! Let me kill that traitor! Let me at him!" Berrowag had been seized by willing hands, and the two men glared at each other, one crazy with rage, the other shrinking with fear.

Dangloss and Allode half carried, half dragged the Prince forward. As he neared Bolaroz and the

Princess he collapsed and became a trembling, moaning suppliant for mercy. Anguish's accusation had struck home.

"Prince Bolaroz, I trust you will not object if the Princess Yetive substitutes the true assassin for the man named in your promise to Graustark," said Anguish, dramatically. Bolaroz, as if coming from a dream, turned and knelt before the throne.

"Most adorable Yetive," he said, "I sue for pardon. I bow low and lay my open heart before the truest woman in the world." He kissed the black lace hem of her gown and arose. "I am your friend and ally; Axphain and Graustark will live no more with hatred in their hearts. From you I have learned a lesson in justice and constancy."

Prince Gabriel was raving like a madman as the officers hurried him and Berrowag from the room. A shout went up from those assembled. Its echo, reaching the halls, then the gardens, was finally taken up by the waiting masses beyond the gates. The news flew like wild-fire. Rejoicing, such as had never been known, shook Edelweiss until the monks on the mountain looked down in wonder.

After the dazed and happy throng about the throne had heaped its expressions of love and devotion upon the radiant Princess a single figure knelt in subjection, just as she was preparing to depart. It was the Duke of Mizrox.

"Your Royal Highness, Mizrox is ready to pay

his forfeit. My life is yours," he said, calmly. She did not comprehend until her uncle reminded her of the oath Mizrox had taken the morning after the murder.

"He swore, on his life, that you killed Lorenz," she said, turning to Lorry.

"I was wrong, but I am willing to pay the penalty. My love for Lorenz was greater than my discretion. That is my only excuse, but it is one you should not accept," said Mizrox, as coolly as if announcing the time of day. Lorry looked first at him and then at the Princess, bewildered and uncertain.

"I have no ill will against you, my Lord Duke. Release him from his bond, Your Highness."

"Gladly, since you refuse to hold him to his oath," she said.

"I am under an eternal obligation to you, sir, for your leniency, and I shall ever revere the Princess who pardons so graciously the gravest error."

Yetive begged Bolaroz to continue to make the Court his home while in Graustark, and the old Prince responded with the declaration that he would remain long enough to sign and approve the new covenant, at least. Before stepping from the throne, Yetive called in low tones to Lorry, a pretty flush mantling her cheek:

"Will you come to me in half an hour?"

"For my reward?" he asked, eagerly.

"Ach!" she cried, softly, reprovingly. Count Hal-

font's face took on a troubled expression as he caught the swift communication in their eyes. After all, she was a Princess.

She passed from the room beside Halfont, proud and happy in the victory over despair, glorying in the exposure of her heart to the world, her blood tingling and dancing with the joys of anticipation. Lorry and Anguish, the wonder and admiration of all, were given a short but convincing levee in the hallway. Lords and ladies praised and lauded them, overwhelming them with the homage that comes to the brave. But Gaspon uttered one wish that struck Lorry's warm, leaping heart like a piece of ice.

"Would to God that you were a Prince of the realm," said the minister of finance, a look of regret and longing in his eyes. That wish of Gaspon's sent Lorry away with the sharp steel of desolation, torturing intensely as it drove deeper and deeper the reawakened pangs of uncertainty. There still remained the fatal distance between him and the object of his heart's desire.

He accompanied Captain Quinnox to his quarters, where he made himself presentable before starting for the enchanted apartment in the far end of the castle. Eager, burning passion throbbed side by side with the cold pulsings of fear, a trembling race between two unconquerable emotions. Passion longed for the voice, the eyes, the caresses; fear cried aloud in every troubled throb: "You will see her and kiss her and then you will be banished."

The two emotions thus thrown together, clashing fiercely for supremacy, at last wove themselves into a single, solid, uncompromising whole. Out of the two grew an aggressive determination not to be thwarted. Love and fear combined to give him strength; from his eyes fled the hopeless look, from his brain the doubt, from his blood the chill.

"Quinnox, give me your hand—don't mind the blood! You have been my friend, and you have served her almost to the death. I injured and would have killed you in that cell, but it was not in anger. Will you be my friend in all that is to follow?"

"She has said that she loves you," said the captain, returning the hand clasp. "I am at your service as well as hers."

A few moments later Lorry was in her presence. What was said or done during the half hour that passed between his entrance and the moment that brought them side by side from the room need not be told. That the interview had had its serious side was plain. The troubled, anxious eyes of the girl and the rebellious, dogged air of the man told of a conflict now only in abeyance.

"I will never give you up," he said, as they came from the door. A wistful gleam flickered in her eyes, but she did not respond in words.

Near the head of the stairway an animated group of persons lingered. Harry Anguish was in the center and the Countess Dagmar was directly in front of him, looking up with sparkling eyes and

parted lips. The Count and Countess Halfont, Gaspon, the Baron Dangloss, the Duke of Mizrox, with other ladies and gentlemen, were being entertained by the gay-spirited stranger.

"Here he comes," cried the latter, as he caught sight of the approaching couple.

"I am delighted to see you, Harry. You were the friend in need, old man," said Lorry, wringing the other's hand. Yetive gave him her hand, her blue eyes overflowing.

"Mr. Anguish had just begun to tell us how he—how he——" began Dagmar, but paused helplessly, looking to him for relief.

"Go ahead, Countess; it isn't very elegant, but it's the way I said it. How I 'got next' to Gabriel is what she wants to say. Perhaps Your Highness would like to know all about the affair that ended so tragically. It's very quickly told," said Anguish.

"I am deeply interested," said the Princess, eagerly.

"Well, in the first place, it was all a bluff," said he, coolly.

"A what!" demanded Dagmar.

"Bluff," responded Harry, briefly; "American patois, dear Countess."

"In what respect," asked Lorry, beginning to understand.

"In all respects. I didn't have the slightest sign of proof against the festive Prince."

"And you—you did all that 'on a bluff'?" gasped the other.

"Do I understand you to say that you have no evidence against Gabriel?" asked Halfont, dumfounded.

"Not a particle."

"But you said his confederate had confessed," protested Dangloss.

"I didn't know that he had a confederate, and I wasn't sure that he was guilty of the crime," boasted Anguish, complacently enjoying the stupefaction.

"Then why did you say so?" demanded Dangloss, excited beyond measure.

"Oh, I just guessed at it!"

"God save us!" gasped Baron Dangloss, Chief of Police.

"Guessed at it?" cried Mizrox.

"That's it. It was a bold stroke, but it won. Now, I'll tell you this much. I was morally certain that Gabriel killed the Prince. There was no way on earth to prove it, however, and I'll admit it was intuition or something of that sort which convinced me. He had tried to abduct the Princess, and he was madly jealous of Lorenz. Although he knew there was to be a duel, he was not certain that Lorenz would lose, so he adopted a clever plan to get rid of two rivals by killing one and casting suspicion on the other. These deductions I made soon after the murder, but, of course, could secure no proof.

Early this morning, at the hotel, I made up my mind to denounce him suddenly if I had the chance, risking failure but hoping for such an exhibition as that which you saw. It was clear to me that he had an accomplice to stand guard while he did the stabbing, but I did not dream it was Berrowag. Lorry's sensational appearance, when I believed him to be far away from here, disturbed me greatly, but it made it all the more necessary that I should take the risk with Gabriel. As I watched him I became absolutely convinced of his guilt. The only way to accuse him was to do it boldly and thoroughly, so I rang in the accomplice and the witness features. You all know how the 'bluff' worked."

"And you had no more proof than this?" asked Dangloss, weakly.

"That's all," laughed the delighted strategist.

Dangloss stared at him for a moment, then threw up his hands and walked away, shaking his head, whether in stupefied admiration or utter disbelief, no one knew. The others covered Anguish with compliments, and he was more than ever the hero of the day. Such confidence paralyzed the people. The only one who was not overcome with astonishment was his countryman.

"You did it well," he said in an undertone to Anguish; "devilish well."

"You might at least say I did it to the queen's taste," growled Anguish, meaningly.

"Well, then, you did," laughed Lorry.

XXVII

ON THE BALCONY AGAIN

Three persons in the royal castle of Graustark, worn by the dread and anxiety of weeks, fatigued by the sleepless nights just past, slumbered through the long afternoon with the motionless, deathlike sleep of the utterly fagged. Yetive, in her darkened bedchamber, dreamed, with smiling lips, of a tall soldier and a throne on which cobwebs multiplied. Grenfall Lorry saw in his dreams a slim soldier with troubled face and averted, timid eyes, standing guard over him with a brave, stiff back and chin painfully uplifted. Captain Quinnox dreamed not, for his mind was tranquil in the assurance that he had been forgiven by the Princess.

While Lorry slept in the room set apart for him, Anguish roamed the park with a happy-faced, slender young lady, into whose ears he poured the history of a certain affection, from the tender beginning to the distracting end. And she smiled and trembled with delight, closing not her ears against the sound of his voice nor her heart to the love that craved admission. They were not dreaming.

After dinner that evening Lorry led the Princess out into the moonlit night. The November breezes were soft and balmy and the shadows deep.

"Let us leave the park to Dagmar and her hero, to the soldiers and the musicians," said Yetive. "There is a broad portico here, with the tenderest of memories. Do you remember a night like this, a month or more ago? the moon, the sentinel and some sorrows? I would again stand where we stood on that night and again look up to the moon and the solemn sentinel, but not as we saw them then, with heartache and evasion."

"The balcony, then, without the old restrictions," Lorry agreed. "I want to see that dark old monastery again, and to tell you how I looked from its lofty windows through the chill of wind and the chill of life into the fairest Eden that was ever denied man."

"In an hour, then, I will meet you there."

"I must correct you. In an hour you will find me there."

She left him, retiring with her aunt and the Countess Dagmar. Lorry remained in the hall with Halfont, Prince Bolaroz, Mizrox and Anguish. The conversation ran once more into the ever-recurring topic of the day, Gabriel's confession. The Prince of Dawsbergen was confined in the Tower with his confederate, Berrowag. Reports from Dangloss late in the afternoon conveyed the intelligence that

the prisoner had fallen into melancholia. Berrowag admitted to the police that he had stood guard at the door while Gabriel entered the Prince's room and killed him as he slept. He described the cunning, deliberate effort to turn suspicion to the American by leaving bloodstains. The other Dawsbergen nobles, with the exception of two who had gone to the capital of their country with the news of the catastrophe, remained close to the hotel. One of them confessed that but little sympathy would be felt at home for Gabriel, who was hated by his subjects. Already there was talk among them of Prince Dantan, his younger brother, as his successor to the throne. The young Prince was a favorite with the people.

Bolaroz was pleased with the outcome of the sensational accusation and the consequent removal of complications which had in reality been unpleasant to him.

One feature of the scene in the throne room was not discussed, although it was uppermost in the minds of all. The positive stand taken by the Princess and her open avowal of love for the dashing American were never to be forgotten. The serious wrinkles on the brow of Halfont and the faraway expression that came frequently to his eyes revealed the nature of his thoughts. The greatest problem of them all was still to be solved.

As they left the room he dropped behind and

walked out beside Lorry, rather timidly detaining him until the others were some distance ahead.

"You were closeted with the Princess this morning, Mr. Lorry, and perhaps you can give me the information I desire. She has called a meeting of the ministers and leading men of the country for tomorrow morning. Do you know why she has issued this rather unusual call? She did not offer any explanation to me."

"I am only at liberty to say, your excellency, that it concerns the welfare of Graustark," answered the other, after a moment's thought. They walked on in silence for some distance.

"I am her uncle, sir, but I love her as I would my own child. My life has been given to her from the day that her mother, my sister, died. You will grant me the right to ask you a plain question. Have you told her that you love her?" The Count's face was drawn and white.

"I have, sir. I loved her before I knew she was a Princess. As her protector, it was to you that I would have told the story of my unfortunate love long ago, but my arrest and escape prevented. It was not my desire or intention to say to her what I could not speak about to you. I do not want to be looked upon as a coward who dares not face difficulties. My love has not been willingly clandestine, and it has been in spite of her most righteous objections. We have both seen the futility of love, how-

ever strong and pure it may be. I have hoped, your excellency, and always shall."

"She has confessed her love to you privately?" asked Halfont.

"Against her will, against her judgment, sir."

"Then the worst has come to pass," groaned the old Count. Neither spoke for some time. They were near the foot of the staircase when Halfont paused and grasped Lorry's arm. Steadily they looked into each other's eyes.

"I admire you more than any man I have ever known," said the Count, huskily. "You are the soul of honor, of courage, of manliness. But, my God, you cannot become the husband of a Princess of Graustark! I need not tell you that, however. You must surely understand."

"I do understand," said Lorry, dizzily. "I am not a prince, as you are saying over and over again to yourself. Count Halfont, every born American may become ruler of the greatest nation in the world —the United States. His home is his kingdom; his wife, his mother, his sisters are his queens and his princesses; his fellow citizens are his admiring subjects if he is wise and good. In my land you will find the poor man climbing to the highest pinnacle, side by side with the rich man. The woman I love is a Princess. Had she been the lowliest maid in all that great land of ours, still would she have been my queen, I her king. When first I loved the mis-

tress of Graustark she was, you must not forget, Miss Guggenslocker. I have said all this to you, sir, not in egotism nor in bitterness, but to show my right to hope in the face of all obstacles. We recognize little as impossible. Until death destroys this power to love and to hope I must say to you that I shall not consider the Princess Yetive beyond my reach. Frankly, I cannot, sir."

The Count heard him through, unconscious admiration mingling with the sadness in his eyes.

"There are some obstacles that bravery and perseverance cannot overcome, my friend," he said, slowly. "One of them is fate."

"As fate is not governed by law or custom, I have the best reason in the world to hope," said Lorry, yet modestly.

"I would indeed, sir, that you were a Prince of the realm," fervently cried the Count, and Lorry was struck by the fact that he repeated, word for word, the wish Gaspon had uttered some hours before.

By this time they were joined by the others, whereupon Grenfall hurried eagerly to the balcony, conscious of being half an hour early, but glad of the chance afforded for reflection and solitude. Sitting on the broad stone railing he leaned back against a pillar and looked into the night for his thoughts. Once more the moon was gleaming beyond St. Valentine's, throwing against the sky a jagged silhouette

of frowning angles, towering gables and monstrous walls, the mountain and the monastery blending into one great misty product of the vision. Voices came up from below, as they did on that night five weeks ago, bringing the laughter and song of happy hearts. Music swelled through the park from the band gallery; from afar off came the sounds of revelry. The people of Edelweiss were rejoicing over the unexpected deliverance from a fate so certain that the escape seemed barely short of miraculous.

Every sound, every rustle of the wind through the plants that were scattered over the balcony caused him to look toward the door through which she must come to him.

At last she appeared, and he hastened to meet her. As he took her hands in his, she said softly, dreamily, looking over his shoulder toward the mountain's crest:

"The same fair moon," and smiled into his eyes.

"The same fair maid and the same man," he added. "I believe the band is playing the same air; upon my soul, I do."

"Yes, the same air, La Paloma. It is my lullaby. Come, let us walk. I cannot sit quietly now. Talk to me. Let me listen and be happy."

Slowly they paced the wide balcony, through the moonlight and the shadows, her hand resting on his arm, his clasping it gently. Love obstructs the flow of speech; the heart-beats choke back the words and

fill the throat. Lorry talked but little, she not at all. Times there were when they covered the full length of the balcony without a word. And yet they understood each other. The mystic, the enchanting silence of love was fraught with a conversation felt, not heard.

"Why are you so quiet?" he asked, at last, stopping near the rail.

"I cannot tell you why. It seems to me that I am afraid of you," she answered, a shy quaver in her voice.

"Afraid of me? I don't understand."

"Nor do I. You are not as you were before this morning. You are different—yes, you make me feel that I am weak and helpless and that you can say to me 'come' and 'go' and I must obey. Isn't it odd that I, who have never known submissiveness, should so suddenly find myself tyrannized?" she asked, smiling faintly.

"Shall I tell you why you are afraid of me?" he asked.

"You will say it is because I am forgetting to be a Princess."

"No; it is because you no longer look upon me as you did in other days. It is because I am a *possibility*, an entity instead of a shadow. Yesterday you were the Princess and looked down upon the impossible suitor; to-day you find that you have given yourself to him and that you do not regard the

barrier as insurmountable. You were not timid until you found your power to resist gone. To-day you admit that I may hope, and in doing so you open a gate through the walls of your pride and prejudice that can never be closed against the love within and the love without. You are afraid of me because I am no longer a dream, but a reality. Am I not right, Yetive?"

She looked out over the hazy, moonlit park.

"Yesterday I might have disputed all you say; to-day I can deny nothing."

Leaning upon the railing, they fell into a silent study of the parade ground and its strollers. Their thoughts were not of the walkers and chatterers, nor of the music, nor of the night. They were of the day to come.

"I shall never forget how you said 'because I love him,' this morning, sweetheart," said Lorry, betraying his reflections. "You defied the whole world in those four words. They were worth dying for."

"How could I help it? You must not forget that you had just leaped into the lion's den defenseless, because you loved me. Could I deny you then? Until that moment I had been the Princess adamant; in a second's time you swept away every safeguard, every battlement, and I surrendered as only a woman can. But it really sounded shocking, didn't it? So theatrical."

"Don't look so distressed about it, dear. You couldn't help it, remember," he said, approvingly.

"Ach, I dread to-morrow's ordeal!" she said, and he felt the arm that touched his own tremble. "What will they say? What will they do?"

"To-morrow will tell. It means a great deal to both of us. If they will not submit—what then?"

"What then—what then?" she murmured, faintly.

Across the parade, coming from the direction of the fountain, Harry Anguish and Dagmar were slowly walking. They were very close together, and his head was bent until it almost touched hers. As they drew nearer, the dreamy watchers on the balcony recognized them.

"They are very happy," said Lorry, knowing that she was also watching the strollers.

"They are so sure of each other," she replied, sadly.

When almost directly beneath the rail, the Countess glanced upward, impelled by the strange instinct of an easily startled love, confident that prying eyes were upon her. She saw the dark forms leaning over the rail and rather jerkily brought her companion to a standstill and to a realization of his position. Anguish turned his eyes aloft.

"Can you, fair maid, tell me the names of those beautiful stars I see in the dark dome above?" he asked, in a loud, happy voice. "Oh, can they be eyes?"

"Eyes, most noble sir," replied his companion. "There are no stars so bright."

"Methought they were diamonds in the sky at first. Eyes like those must belong to some fair divinity."

"They do, fair student, and to a divinity well worth worshiping. I have heard it said that men offer themselves as sacrifices upon her altars."

"Unless my telescope deceives me, I discern a very handsome sacrifice up there, so I suppose the altar must be somewhere in the neighborhood."

"Not a hand's breadth beneath her eyes," laughed the Countess, as she fled precipitately up the steps, followed by the jesting student."

"Beware of a divinity in wrath," came a sweet, clear voice from the balcony, and Anguish called out from his safe retreat, like the boy he was:

"Ah, who's afraid!"

The Princess was laughing softly, her eyes radiant as they met those of her companion, amused yet grave.

"Does he have a care?" she asked.

"I fear not. He loves a Countess."

"He has not to pay the price of ambition, then?" said she, softly.

"Ambition is the cheapest article in the world," he said. "It concerns only a man's self."

XXVIII

THE MAID OF GRAUSTARK

Expectancy, concern, the dread of uncertainty marked the countenances of Graustark's ministers and her chief men as they sat in the council chamber on the day following, awaiting the appearance of their Princess, at whose call they were unexpectedly assembled. More than two score eyes glanced nervously toward the door from time to time.

All realized an emergency. No sooner were they out of one dilemma than another cast its prospects across their path, creating the fear that rejoicing would be short. While none knew the nature of the business that called them together, each had a stubborn suspicion that it related to the stirring declarations of the day before. Not one in that assembly but had heard the vivid, soulful sentence from the throne. Not one but wished in secret as Gaspon and Halfont had wished in open speech.

When the Princess entered with the prime minister they narrowly scanned the face so dear to them. Determination and cowardice were blended in the deep blue eyes, pride and dejection in the firm step, strength and weakness in the loving smile she bestowed upon the faithful counsellors. After the greetings she requested them to draw chairs about the great table. Seating herself in her accustomed

seat, she gazed over the circle of anxious faces and realized, more than at any time in her young life, that she was frail and weak beyond all comparison. How small she was to rule over those strong, wise men of hers; how feeble the hand that held the sceptre.

"My lords," she said, summoning all her strength of mind and heart, "I am gratified to find you so ready to respond to the call of your whimsical sovereign. Yesterday you came with hearts bowed down and in deepest woe. To-day I assemble you here that I may ask your advice concerning the events of that strange day. Bolaroz will do as he has promised. We are to have the extension papers this afternoon, and Graustark may breathe again the strong, deep breath of hope. You well remember my attitude on yesterday. You were shocked, horrified, amazed by my seemingly ignoble efforts to preserve my preserver's life. We will pass over that, however. It is to discuss my position that I have called you here. To begin, I would have sacrificed my kingdom, as you know, to save him. He was innocent and I loved him. If, on yesterday, I would not let my kingdom stand between me and my love, I cannot do so to-day. I have called you here to tell you, my lords, that I have promised to become the wife of the man who would have given his life for you and for me—that I love as a woman, not as a Princess."

The silence of death stole into the room. Every

man's eyes were glued upon the white face of the Princess and none could break the spell. They had expected it, yet the shock was overwhelming; they had feared it, yet the announcement stupefied them. She looked straight before her, afraid to meet the eyes of her subjects, knowing that sickening disapproval dwelt in them. Not a word was uttered for many seconds. Then old Caspar's tense muscles relaxed and his arms dropped limply from their crossed position on his breast.

"My child, my child!" he cried, lifelessly. "You cannot do this thing!"

"But the people?" cried Gaspon, his eyes gleaming. "You cannot act against the will of the people. Our laws, natural and otherwise, proscribe the very act you have in mind. The American cannot go upon our throne; no man, unless he be of royal blood, can share it with you. If you marry him the laws of our land—you know them well—will prohibit us from recognizing the marriage."

"Knowing that, my lords, I have come to ask you to revise our laws. My throne will not be disgraced by the man I would have share it with me." She spoke as calmly as if she were making the most trivial request instead of asking her ministers to overthrow and undo the laws and customs of ages and of dynasties.

"The law of nature cannot be changed," muttered Caspar, as if to himself.

"In the event that the custom cannot be changed,

I shall be compelled to relinquish my right to occupy the throne and to depart from among you. It would break my heart, my lords, to resort to this monstrous sacrifice, but I love one man first, my crown and my people after him."

"You would not leave us—you would not throw aside as despised the crown your ancestors wore for centuries?" cried Gaspon. "Is Your Royal Highness mad?"

The others were staring with open mouths and icy hearts.

"Yes, as much as it would grieve me, I would do all this," she answered, firmly, not daring to look at her uncle. She knew his eyes were upon her and that condemnation lurked in their depths. Her heart ached to turn to him with a prayer for forgiveness, but there could be no faltering now.

"I ask you, my lords, to acknowledge the marriage of your ruler to Grenfall Lorry. I am to be his wife; but I entreat you to grant me happiness without making me endure the misery that will come to me if I desert my father's throne and the people who have worshipped me and to whom I am bound by a tie that cannot be broken. I do not plead so much for the right to rule as I do for the one who may rule after I am gone. I want my own to follow me on the throne of Graustark."

Then followed a long, animated discussion, growing brighter and more hopeful as the speakers' willing hearts warmed to the proposition. Lorry was

a favorite, but he could not be their prince. Hereditary law prohibited. Still his children, if God gave him children, might be declared rightful heirs to the throne of their mother, the Princess. The more they talked, the more the problem seemed to solve itself. Many times the Princess and her wise men met and overcame obstacles, huge at first, minimized in the end, all because they loved her and she loved them. The departure from traditionary custom, as suggested by the Princess,—coupled with the threat to abdicate,—was the weightiest, yet the most delicate question that had ever come before the chief men of Graustark. It meant the beginning of a new line of princes, new life, new blood, a complete transformation of order as it had come down through the reigns of many Ganlooks. For the first time in the history of the country a woman was sovereign; for the first time there had been no direct male heir to the throne. With the death of old Prince Ganlook the masculine side of the illustrious family ended. No matter whom his daughter took for a husband, the line was broken. Why not the bold, progressive, rich American? argued some. Others fell in with the views of the few who first surrendered to the will of Yetive, until at last but one remained in opposition. Count Caspar held out until all were against him, giving way finally in a burst of oratory which ended in tears and sobs, and which made the sense of the gathering unanimous.

The Princess Yetive won the day, so far as her

own position was concerned. But, there was Lorry to be considered.

"Mr. Lorry knows that I called you together in consultation, but he does not know that I would have given up my crown for him. I dared not tell him that. He knows only that I was to ask your advice on the question of marriage, and that alone. Last night he told me he was confident you would agree to the union. He is an American, and does not appreciate the difficulties attending such an espousal. Over there distinction exists only in wealth and intelligence—position, I believe they call it, but not such as ours. He is a strange man, and we have yet to consult him as to the arrangement," she said to her lords, pursing her lips. "I fear he will object to the plan we have agreed upon," she went on. "He is sensitive, and it is possible he will not like the idea of putting our marriage to the popular vote of the people."

"I insist, however, that the people be considered in the matter," said Gaspon. "In three months' time the whole nation can say whether it sanctions the revision of our laws of heredity. It would not be right or just for us to say who shall be their future rulers, for all time to come, without consulting them."

"I have no hesitancy in saying that Graustark already idolizes this brave American," said Halfont, warmly. "He has won her affection. If the question is placed before the people to-morrow in proper

form, I will vouch for it that the whole nation will rise and cry: 'Long live the Princess! Long live the Prince Consort!' "

. . . . . .

"Going back, I see," said Sitzky, the guard, some months later, addressing a very busy young man, who was hurrying down the platform of the Edelweiss railway station toward the special train which was puffing impatiently.

"Hello, Sitzky! Is it you? I'm glad to see you again. Yes, we are going back to the land of the Stars and Stripes." The speaker was Mr. Anguish.

"You'll have fine company's fer as Vienna, too. D' you ever see such celebration's dey're havin' here to-day? You'd t'ink d' whole world was interested in d' little visit Her Royal Highness is goin' to pay to Vienna. Dummed if d' whole city, soldiers an' all, ain't down here to see 'er off. Look at d' crowd! By glory, I don't b'lieve we c'n pull d' train out of d' station. 'Quainted wid any of d' royal crowd?"

"Slightly," answered Anguish, smiling. He was watching a trim figure in a tailor-made gown as it approached, drawing apart from the throng. It was Mrs. Harry Van Brugh Anguish.

"Say, you must cut some ice wid dese people. But dat's jest like an American, dough," the little guard went on. "De Princess married an American an' dey say he's goin' to put d' crown away where d' moths won't git at it an' take her over to live in Washington fer six months. Is it a sure t'ing?"

"That's right, Sitzky. She's going back with us and then we're coming back with her."

"Why don't he keep 'er over dere when he gits her dere? What's d' use—what's d' use?"

"Well, she's still the Princess of Graustark, you know, Sitzky. She can't live always in America."

"Got to be here to hold her job, eh?"

"Inelegant, but correct. Now, look sharp! Where do we find our—Ah!" His wife was with him and he forgot Sitzky.

The guard turned to watch the procession—a file of soldiers, a cavalry troop, carriages and then—*the* carriage with spirited horses and gay accoutrements. It stopped with a jangle and a man and woman descended.

"The Princess!" cried Sitzky.

"Long live the Princess!" cried the crowd. "God save our Yetive!"

Sitzky started as if shot, staring at the tall man who approached with the smiling Sovereign of Graustark. "Well," he gasped, "what d' you t'ink o' dat!"

The train that was to carry them out of the East into the West puffed and snorted, the bell clanged, the people cheered, and they were off. Hours later, as the car whirled through the Hungarian plain, Yetive, looking from her window, said in that exquisite English which was her very own:

"Ah, the world, the dear world! I am so sorry for queens!"

THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK

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CHAPTER I

MR. AND MRS. BLITHERS DISCUSS MATRIMONY

"My dear," said Mr. Blithers, with decision, "you can't tell me."

"I know I can't," said his wife, quite as positively. She knew when she could tell him a thing and when she couldn't.

It was quite impossible to impart information to Mr. Blithers when he had the tips of two resolute fingers embedded in his ears. That happened to be his customary and rather unfair method of conquering her when an argument was going against him, not for want of logic on his part, but because it was easier to express himself with his ears closed than with them open. By this means he effectually shut out the voice of opposition and had the discussion all to himself. Of course, it would have been more convincing if he had been permitted to hear the sound of his own eloquence; still, it was effective.

She was sure to go on talking for two or three minutes and then subside in despair. A woman will not talk to a stone wall. Nor will she wantonly allow an argument to die while there remains the slightest chance of its survival. Given the same situation, a man would get up and leave his wife sitting there with her fingers in her ears; and, as he bolted from the room in high dudgeon, he would be mean enough to call at-

tention to her pig-headedness. In most cases, a woman is content to listen to a silly argument rather than to leave the room just because her husband elects to be childish about a perfectly simple elucidation of the truth.

Mrs. Blithers had lived with Mr. Blithers, more or less, for twenty-five years and she knew him like a book. He was a forceful person who would have his own way, even though he had to put his fingers in his ears to get it. At one period of their joint connubial agreement, when he had succeeded in accumulating a pitiful hoard amounting to but little more than ten millions of dollars, she concluded to live abroad for the purpose of educating their daughter, allowing him in the meantime to increase his fortune to something like fifty millions without having to worry about household affairs. But she had sojourned with him long enough, at odd times, to realise that, so long as he lived, he would never run away from an argument — unless, by some dreadful hook or crook, he should be so unfortunate as to be deprived of the use of both hands. She found room to gloat, of course, in the fact that he was obliged to stop up his ears in order to shut out the incontrovertible.

Moreover, when he called her "my dear" instead of the customary Lou, it was a sign of supreme obstinacy on his part and could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as an indication of placid affection. He always said "my dear" at the top of his voice and with a great deal of irascibility.

Mr. William W. Blithers was a self-made man who had begun his career by shouting lustily at a team of mules in a railway construction camp. Other drivers had tried to improve on his vocabulary but even the mules were able to appreciate the futility of such an ambition, and later on, when he came to own two or three railroads, to say nothing of a few mines and a steam yacht, his ability to drive men was even more noteworthy than his power over the jackasses had been. But driving mules and men was one thing, driving a wife another. What incentive has a man, said he, when after he gets through bullying a creature that very creature turns in and caresses him? No self-respecting mule ever did such a thing as that, and no man would think of it except with horror. There is absolutely no defence against a creature who will rub your head with loving, gentle fingers after she has worked you up to the point where you could kill her with pleasure — or at least so said Mr. Blithers with rueful frequency.

Mr. and Mrs. Blithers had been discussing royalty. Up to the previous week they had restricted themselves to the nobility, but as an event of unexampled importance had transpired in the interim, they now felt that it would be the rankest stupidity to consider any one short of a Prince Royal in picking out a suitable husband — or, more properly speaking, consort — for their only daughter, Maud Applegate Blithers, aged twenty.

Mrs. Blithers long ago had convinced her husband

that no ordinary human being of the male persuasion was worthy of their daughter's hand, and had set her heart on having nothing meaner than a Duke on the family roll,—(Blithers alluded to it for a while as the pay-roll)—, with the choice lying between England and Italy. At first, Blithers, being an honest soul, insisted that a good American gentleman was all that anybody could ask for in the way of a son-in-law, and that when it came to a grandchild it would be perfectly proper to christen him Duke — lots of people did! — and that was about all that a title amounted to anyway. She met this with the retort that Maud might marry a man named Jones, and how would Duke Jones sound? He weakly suggested that they could christen him Marmaduke and — but she reminded him of his oft-repeated boast that there was nothing in the world too good for Maud and instituted a pictorial campaign against his prejudices by painting in the most alluring colours the picture of a ducal palace in which the name of Jones would never be uttered except when employed in directing the fifth footman or the third stable-boy — or perhaps a scullery maid — to do this, that or the other thing at the behest of her Grace, the daughter of William W. Blithers. This eventually worked on his imagination to such an extent that he forgot his natural pride and admitted that perhaps she was right.

But now, just as they were on the point of accepting, in lieu of a Duke, an exceptionally promising Count, the aforesaid event conspired to completely

upset all of their plans — or notions, so to speak. It was nothing less than the arrival in America of an eligible Prince of the royal blood, a ruling Prince at that. As a matter of fact he had not only arrived in America but upon the vast estate adjoining their own in the Catskills.

Fortunately nothing definite had been arranged with the Count. Mrs. Blithers now advised waiting a while before giving a definite answer to his somewhat eager proposal, especially as he was reputed to have sufficient means of his own to defend the chateau against any immediate peril of profligacy. She counselled Mr. Blithers to notify him that he deemed it wise to take the matter under advisement for a couple of weeks at least, but not to commit himself to anything positively negative.

Mr. Blithers said that he had never heard anything so beautifully adroit as "positively negative," and directed his secretary to submit to him without delay the draft of a tactful letter to the anxious nobleman. They were agreed that a Prince was more to be desired than a Count and, as long as they were actually about it, they might as well aim high. Somewhat hazily Mr. Blithers had inquired if it wouldn't be worth while to consider a King, but his wife set him straight in short order.

Peculiarly promising to their hopes was the indisputable fact that the Prince's mother had married an American, thereby establishing a precedent behind which no constitutional obstacle could thrive, and had

lived very happily with the gentleman in spite of the critics. Moreover, she had met him while sojourning on American soil, and that was certainly an excellent augury for the success of the present enterprise. What could be more fitting than that the son should follow in the footsteps of an illustrious mother? If an American gentleman was worthy of a princess, why not the other way about? Certainly Maud Blithers was as full of attributes as any man in America.

It appears that the Prince, after leisurely crossing the continent on his way around the world, had come to the Truxton Kings for a long-promised and much-desired visit, the duration of which depended to some extent on his own inclinations, and not a little on the outcome of the war-talk that affected two great European nations — Russia and Austria. Ever since the historic war between the Balkan allies and the Turks, in 1912 and 1913, there had been mutterings, and now the situation had come to be admittedly precarious. Mr. Blithers was in a position to know that the little principality over which the young man reigned was bound to be drawn into the cataclysm, not as a belligerent or an ally, but in the matter of a loan that inconveniently expired within the year and which would hardly be renewed by Russia with the prospect of vast expenditures of war threatening her treasury. The loan undoubtedly would be called and Graustark was not in a position to pay out of her own slender resources, two years of famine having fallen upon the

people at a time when prosperity was most to be desired.

He was in touch with the great financial movements in all the world's capitals, and he knew that retrenchment was the watchword. It would be no easy matter for the little principality to negotiate a loan at this particular time, nor was there even a slender chance that Russia would be benevolently disposed toward her debtors, no matter how small their obligations. They who owed would be called upon to pay, they who petitioned would be turned away with scant courtesy. It was the private opinion of Mr. Blithers that the young Prince and the trusted agents who accompanied him on his journey, were in the United States solely for the purpose of arranging a loan through sources that could only be reached by personal appeal. But, naturally, Mr. Blithers couldn't breathe this to a soul. Under the circumstances he couldn't even breathe it to his wife who, he firmly believed, was soulless.

But all this is beside the question. The young Prince of Graustark was enjoying American hospitality, and no matter what he owed to Russia, America owed to him its most punctillious consideration. If Mr. Blithers was to have anything to say about the matter, it would be for the ear of the Prince alone and not for the busybodies.

The main point is that the Prince was now rusticating within what you might call a stone's throw of the capacious and lordly country residence of Mr. Blithers; moreover, he was an uncommonly attractive chap,

with a laugh that was so charged with heartiness that it didn't seem possible that he could have a drop of royal blood in his vigorous young body. And the perfectly ridiculous part of the whole situation was that Mr. and Mrs. King lived in a modest, vine-covered little house that could have been lost in the servants' quarters at Blitherwood. Especially aggravating, too, was the attitude of the Kings. They were really nobodies, so to speak, and yet they blithely called their royal guest "Bobby" and allowed him to fetch and carry for their women-folk quite as if he were an ordinary whipper-snapper up from the city to spend the week-end.

The remark with which Mr. Blithers introduces this chapter was in response to an oft-repeated declaration made by his wife in the shade of the red, white and blue awning of the terrace overlooking, from its despotic heights, the modest red roof of the King villa in the valley below. Mrs. Blithers merely had stated — but over and over again — that money couldn't buy everything in the world, referring directly to social eminence and indirectly to their secret ambition to capture a Prince of the royal blood for their daughter Maud. She had prefaced this opinion, however, with the exceedingly irritating insinuation that Mr. Blithers was not in his right mind when he proposed inviting the Prince to spend a few weeks at Blitherwood, provided the young man could cut short his visit in the home of Mr. and Mrs. King, who, he had asseverated, were not in a position to entertain roy-

alty as royalty was in the habit of being entertained.

Long experience had taught Mr. Blithers to read the lip and eye language with some degree of certainty, so by watching his wife's indignant face closely he was able to tell when she was succumbing to reason. He was a burly, domineering person who reasoned for every one within range of his voice, and it was only when his wife became coldly sarcastic that he closed his ears and boomed his opinions into her very teeth, so to say, joyfully overwhelming her with facts which it were futile for her to attempt to deny. He was aware, quite as much so as if he had heard the words, that she was now saying:

"Well, there is absolutely no use arguing with you, Will. Have it your way if it pleases you."

Eying her with some uneasiness, he cautiously inserted his thumbs in the armholes of his brocaded waistcoat, and proclaimed:

"As I said before, Lou, there isn't a foreign nobleman, from the Emperor down, who is above grabbing a few million dollars. They're all hard up, and what do they gain by marrying ladies of noble birth if said ladies are the daughters of noblemen who are as hard up as all the rest of 'em? Besides, hasn't Maud been presented at Court? Didn't you see to that? How about that pearl necklace I gave her when she was presented? Wasn't it the talk of the season? There wasn't a Duke in England who didn't figure the cost of that necklace to within a guinea or two. No girl ever had better advertising than —"

"We were speaking of Prince Robin," remarked his wife, with a slight shudder. Mrs. Blithers came of better stock than her husband. His gaucheries frequently set her teeth on edge. She was born in Providence and sometimes mentioned the occurrence when particularly desirous of squelching him, not unkindly perhaps but by way of making him realise that their daughter had good blood in her veins. Mr. Blithers had heard, in a round-about way, that he first saw the light of day in Jersey City, although after he became famous Newark claimed him. He did not bother about the matter.

"Well, he's like all the rest of them," said he, after a moment of indecision. Something told him that he really ought to refrain from talking about the cost of things, even in the bosom of his family. He had heard that only vulgarians speak of their possessions. "Now, there's no reason in the world why we shouldn't consider his offer. He —"

"Offer?" she cried, aghast. "He has made no offer, Will. He doesn't even know that Maud is in existence. How can you say such a thing?"

"I was merely looking ahead, that's all. My motto is 'Look Ahead.' You know it as well as I do. Where would I be to-day if I hadn't looked ahead and seen what was going to happen before the other fellow had his eyes open? Will you tell me that? Where, I say? What's more, where would I be now if I hadn't looked ahead and seen what a marriage with the daughter of Judge Morton would mean to me in the long

run?" He felt that he had uttered a very pretty and convincing compliment. "I never made a bad bargain in my life, Lou, and it wasn't guess-work when I married you. You, my dear old girl, you were the solid foundation on which I —"

"I know," she said wearily; "you've said it a thousand times: 'The foundation on which I built my temple of posterity'— yes, I know, Will. But I am still unalterably opposed to making ourselves ridiculous in the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. King."

"Ridiculous? I don't understand you."

"Well, you will after you think it over," she said quietly, and he scowled in positive perplexity.

"Don't you think he'd be a good match for Maud?" he asked, after many minutes. He felt that he had thought it over.

"Are you thinking of kidnapping him, Will?" she demanded.

"Certainly not! But all you've got to do is to say that he's the man for Maud and I'll — I'll do the rest. That's the kind of a man I am, Lou. You say you don't want Count What's-His-Name,— that is, you don't want him as much as you did,— and you do say that it would be the grandest thing in the world if Maud could be the Princess of Grosstick —"

"Graustark, Will."

"That's what I said. Well, if you want her to be the Princess of *THAT*, I'll see that she is, providing this fellow is a gentleman and worthy of *her*. The only Prince I ever knew was a damned rascal, and I'm

going to be careful about this one. You remember that measly —"

"There is no question about Prince Robin," said she sharply.

"I suppose the only question is, how much will he want?"

"You mean — settlement?"

"Sure."

"Have you no romance in your soul, William Blithers?"

"I never believed in fairy stories," said he grimly. "And what's more, I don't take any stock in cheap novels in which American heroes go about marrying into royal families and all that sort of rot. It isn't done, Lou. If you want to marry into a royal family you've got to put up the coin."

"Prince Robin's mother, the poor Princess Yetive, married an American for love, let me remind you."

"Umph! Where is this Groostock anyway?"

"'Somewhere east of the setting sun,'" she quoted. "You *must* learn how to pronounce it."

"I never was good at foreign languages. By the way, where is Maud this afternoon?"

"Motoring."

He waited for additional information. It was not vouchsafed, so he demanded somewhat fearfully:

"Who with?"

"Young Scoville."

He scowled. "He's a loafer, Lou. No good in the world. I don't like the way you let —"

"He is of a very good family, my dear. I —"

"Is he — er — in love with her?"

"Certainly."

"Good Lord!"

"And why not? Isn't every one she meets in love with her?"

"I — I suppose so," he admitted sheepishly. His face brightened. "And there's no reason why this Prince shouldn't fall heels over head, is there? Well, there you are! That will make a difference in the settlement, believe me — a difference of a couple of millions at least, if —"

She arose abruptly. "You are positively disgusting, Will. Can't you think of anything but —"

"Say, ain't that Maudie coming up the drive now? Sure it is! By gracious, did you ever see anything to beat her? She's got 'em all beat a mile when it comes to looks and style and — Oh, by the way," lowering his voice to a hoarse, confidential whisper, "— I wouldn't say anything to her about the marriage just yet if I were you. I want to look him over first."

CHAPTER II

TWO COUNTRIES DISCUSS MARRIAGE

Prince Robin of Graustark was as good-looking a chap as one would see in a week's journey. Little would one suspect him of being the descendant of a long and distinguished line of princes, save for the unmistakeable though indefinable something in his eye that exacted rather than invited the homage of his fellow man. His laugh was a free and merry one, his spirits as effervescent as wine, his manner blithe and boyish; yet beneath all this fair and guileless exposition of carelessness lay the sober integrity of caste. It looked out through the steady, unswerving eyes, even when they twinkled with mirth; it met the gaze of the world with a serene imperiousness that gave way before no mortal influence; it told without boastfulness a story of centuries. For he was the son of a princess royal, and the blood of ten score rulers of men had come down to him as a heritage of strength.

His mother, the beautiful, gracious and lamented Yetive, set all royal circles by the ears when she married the American, Lorry, back in the nineties. A special act of the ministry had legalised this union and the son of the American was not deprived of his right to succeed to the throne which his forebears had occupied for centuries. From his mother he had inherited the right of kings, from his father the spirit of

freedom; from his mother the power of majesty, from his father the power to see beyond that majesty. When little more than a babe in arms he was orphaned and the affairs of state fell upon the shoulders of three loyal and devoted men who served as regents until he became of age.

Wisely they served both him and the people through the years that intervened between the death of the Princess and her consort and the day when he reached his majority. That day was a glorious one in Graustark. The people worshipped the little Prince when he was in knickerbockers and played with toys; they saw him grow to manhood with hearts that were full of hope and contentment; they made him their real ruler with the same joyous spirit that had attended him in the days when he sat in the great throne and "made believe" that he was one of the mighty, despite the fact that his little legs barely reached to the edge of the gold and silver seat,— and slept soundly through all the befuddling sessions of the cabinet. He was seven when the great revolt headed by Count Marlanx came so near to overthrowing the government, and he behaved like the Prince that he was. It was during those perilous times that he came to know the gallant Truxton King in whose home he was now a happy guest. But before Truxton King he knew the lovely girl who became the wife of that devoted adventurer, and who, to him, was always to be "Aunt Loraine."

As a very small boy he had paid two visits to the homeland of his father, but after the death of his par-

ents his valuable little person was guarded so jealously by his subjects that not once had he set foot beyond the borders of Graustark, except on two widely separated occasions of great pomp and ceremony at the courts of Vienna and St. Petersburgh, and a secret journey to London when he was seventeen. (It appears that he was determined to see a great football match.) On each of these occasions he was attended by watchful members of the cabinet and certain military units in the now far from insignificant standing army. As a matter of fact, he witnessed the football match from the ordinary stands, surrounded by thousands of unsuspecting Britons, but carefully wedged in between two generals of his own army and flanked by a minister of police, a minister of the treasury and a minister of war, all of whom were excessively bored by the contest and more or less appalled by his unregal enthusiasm. He had insisted on going to the match incog, to enjoy it for all it was worth to the real spectators — those who sit or stand where the compression is not unlike that applied to a box of sardines.

The regency expired when he was twenty years of age, and he became ruler in fact, of himself as well as of the half-million subjects who had waited patiently for the great day that was to see him crowned and glorified. Not one was there in that goodly half million who stood out against him on that triumphant day; not one who possessed a sullen or resentful heart. He was their Prince, and they loved him well. After that wonderful coronation day he would never forget

that he was a Prince or that the hearts of a half million were to throb with love for him so long as he was man as well as Prince.

Mr. Blithers was very close to the truth when he said (to himself, if you remember) that the financial situation in the far-off principality was not all that could be desired. It is true that Graustark was in Russia's debt to the extent of some twenty million gavvos,— about thirty millions of dollars, in other words,— and that the day of reckoning was very near at hand. The loan was for a period of twelve years, and had been arranged contrary to the advice of John Tullis, an American financier who long had been interested in the welfare of the principality through friendship for the lamented Prince Consort, Lorry. He had been farsighted enough to realise that Russia would prove a hard creditor, even though she may have been sincere in her protestations of friendship for the modest borrower.

A stubborn element in the cabinet overcame his opposition, however, and the debt was contracted, taxation increased by popular vote and a period of governmental thriftiness inaugurated. Railroads, highways, bridges and aqueducts were built, owned and controlled by the state, and the city of Edelweiss rebuilt after the devastation created during the revolt of Count Marlanx and his minions. There seemed to be some prospect of vindication for the ministry and Tullis, who lived in Edelweiss, was fair-minded enough to admit that their action appeared to have been for

the best. The people had prospered and taxes were paid in full and without complaint. The reserve fund grew steadily and surely and there was every prospect that when the huge debt came due it would be paid in cash. But on the very crest of their prosperity came adversity. For two years the crops failed and a pestilence swept through the herds. The flood of gavvos that had been pouring into the treasury dwindled into a pitiful rivulet; the little that came in was applied, of necessity, to administration purposes and the maintenance of the army, and there was not so much as a penny left over for the so-called sinking fund.

A year of grace remained. The minister of finance had long since recovered from the delusion that it would be easy to borrow from England or France to pay the Russians, there being small prospect of a renewal by the Czar even for a short period at a higher rate of interest. The great nations of Europe made it plain to the little principality that they would not put a finger in Russia's pie at this stage of the game. Russia was ready to go to war with her great neighbour, Austria. Diplomacy — caution, if you will,— made it imperative that other nations should sit tight and look to their own knitting, so to say. Not one could afford to be charged with befriending, even in a round-about way, either of the angry grumblers.

It was only too well known in diplomatic circles that Russia coveted the railroads of Graustark, as a means of throwing troops into a remote and almost impregnable portion of Austria. If the debt were

paid promptly, it would be impossible, according to international law, for the great White Bear to take over these roads and at least a portion of the western border of the principality. Obviously, Austria would be benefitted by the prompt lifting of the debt, but her own relations with Russia were so strained that an offer to come to the rescue of Graustark would be taken at once as an open affront and vigorously resented. Her hands were tied.

The northern and western parts of Graustark were rich with productive mines. The government had built railroads throughout these sections so that the yield of coal and copper might be given an outlet to the world at large. In making the loan, Russia had demanded these prosperous sections as security for the vast sum advanced, and Graustark in an evil hour had submitted, little suspecting the trick that Dame Nature was to play in the end.

Private banking institutions in Europe refused to make loans under the rather exasperating circumstances, preferring to take no chances. Money was not cheap in these bitter days, neither in Europe nor America. Caution was the watchword. A vast European war was not improbable, despite the sincere efforts on the part of the various nations to keep out of the controversy.

Nor was Mr. Blithers far from right in his shrewd surmise that Prince Robin and his agents were not without hope in coming to America at this particular time. Graustark had laid by barely half the amount

required to lift the debt to Russia. It was not beyond the bounds of reason to expect her Prince to secure the remaining fifteen millions through private sources in New York City.

Six weeks prior to his arrival in New York, the young Prince landed in San Francisco. He had come by way of the Orient, accompanied by the Chief of Staff of the Graustark Army, Count Quinnox,—hereditary watch-dog to the royal family!—and a young lieutenant of the guard, Boske Dank. Two men were they who would have given a thousand lives in the service of their Prince. No less loyal was the body-servant who looked after the personal wants of the eager young traveller, an Englishman of the name of Hobbs. A very poor valet was he, but an exceptionally capable person when it came to the checking of luggage and the divining of railway time-tables. He had been an agent for Cook's. It was quite impossible to miss a train that Hobbs suspected of being the right one.

Prince Robin came unheralded and traversed the breadth of the continent without attracting more than the attention that is bestowed upon good-looking young men. Like his mother, nearly a quarter of a century before, he travelled incognito. But where she had used the somewhat emphatic name of Guggenslocker, he was known to the hotel registers as "Mr. R. Schmidt and servant."

There was romance in the eager young soul of Prince Robin. He revelled in the love story of his

parents. The beautiful Princess Yetive first saw Grenfell Lorry in an express train going eastward from Denver. Their wonderful romance was born, so to speak, in a Pullman compartment car, and it thrived so splendidly that it almost upset a dynasty, for never — in all of nine centuries — had a ruler of Graustark stooped to marriage with a commoner.

And so when the far-sighted ministry and House of Nobles in Graustark set about to select a wife for their young ruler, they made overtures to the Prince of Dawsbergen whose domain adjoined Graustark on the south. The Crown Princess of Dawsbergen, then but fifteen, was the unanimous choice of the amiable match-makers in secret conclave. This was when Robin was seventeen and just over being fatuously in love with his middle-aged instructress in French.

The Prince of Dawsbergen despatched an embassy of noblemen to assure his neighbour that the match would be highly acceptable to him and that in proper season the betrothal might be announced. But alack! both courts overlooked the fact that there was independent American blood in the two young people. Neither the Prince of Graustark nor the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen,— whose mother was a Miss Beverly Calhoun of Virginia,— was disposed to listen to the voice of expediency; in fact, at a safe distance of three or four hundred miles, the youngsters figuratively turned up their noses at each other and

frankly confessed that they hated each other and wouldn't be bullied into getting married, no matter what *anybody* said, or something of the sort.

"S'pose I'm going to say I'll marry a girl I've never seen?" demanded seventeen-year-old Robin, full of wrath. "Not I, my lords. I'm going to look about a bit, if you don't mind. The world is full of girls. I'll marry the one I happen to want or I'll not marry at all."

"But, highness," they protested, "you must listen to reason. There must be a successor to the throne of Graustark. You would not have the name die with you. The young Princess is —"

"Is fifteen you say," he interrupted loftily. "Come around in ten years and we'll talk it over again. But I'm not going to pledge myself to marry a child in short frocks, name or no name. Is she pretty?"

The lords did not know. They had not seen the young lady.

"If she is pretty you'd be sure to know it, my lords, so we'll assume she isn't. I saw her when she was three years old, and she certainly was a fright when she cried, and, my lords, she cried all the time. No, I'll not marry her. Be good enough to say to the Prince of Dawsbergen that I'm very much obliged to him, but it's quite out of the question."

And the fifteen-year-old Crown Princess, four hundred miles away, coolly informed her doting parents that she was tired of being a Princess anyway and very much preferred marrying some one who lived in

a cottage. In fine, she stamped her little foot and said she'd jump into the river before she'd marry the Prince of Graustark.

"But he's a very handsome, adorable boy," began her mother.

"And half-American just as you are, my child," put in her father encouragingly. "Nothing could be more suitable than —"

"I don't intend to marry anybody until I'm thirty at least, so that ends it, daddy,— I mean, your poor old highness."

"Naturally we do not expect you to be married before you are out of short frocks, my dear," said Prince Dantan stiffly. "But a betrothal is quite another thing. It is customary to arrange these marriages years before —"

"Is Prince Robin in love with me?"

"I — ahem! — that's a very silly question. He hasn't seen you since you were a baby. But he *will* be in love with you, never fear."

"He may be in love with some one else, for all we know, so where do I come in?"

"Come in?" gasped her father.

"She's part American, dear," explained the mother, with her prettiest smile.

"Besides," said the Crown Princess, with finality, "I'm not even going to be engaged to a man I've never seen. And if you insist, I'll run away as sure as anything."

And so the matter rested. Five years have passed

since the initial overtures were made by the two courts, and although several sly attempts were made to bring the young people to a proper understanding of their case, they aroused nothing more than scornful laughter on the part of the belligerents, as the venerable Baron Dangloss was wont to call them, not without pride in his sharp old voice.

"It all comes from mixing the blood," said the Prime Minister gloomily.

"Or improving it," said the Baron, and was frowned upon.

And no one saw the portentous shadow cast by the slim daughter of William W. Blithers, for the simple reason that neither Graustark nor Dawsbergen knew that it existed. They lived in serene ignorance of the fact that God, while he was about it, put Maud Applegate Blithers into the world on precisely the same day that the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen first saw the light of day.

On the twenty-second anniversary of his birth, Prince Robin fared forth in quest of love and romance, not without hope of adventure, for he was a valorous chap with the heritage of warriors in his veins. Said he to himself in dreamy contemplation of the long journey ahead of him: "I will traverse the great highways that my mother trod and I will look for the Golden Girl sitting by the wayside. She must be there, and though it is a wide world, I am young and my eyes are sharp. I will find her sitting at the roadside eager for me to come, not housed in a gloomy

castle surrounded by the spooks of a hundred ancestors. They who live in castles wed to hate and they who wed at the roadside live to love. Fortune attend me! If love lies at the roadside waiting, do not let me pass it by. All the princesses are not inside the castles. Some sit outside the gates and laugh with glee, for love is their companion. So away I go, la, la! looking for the princess with the happy heart and the smiling lips! It is a wide world but my eyes are sharp. I shall find my princess."

But, alas, for his fine young dream, he found no Golden Girl at the roadside nor anything that suggested romance. There were happy hearts and smiling lips — and all for him, it would appear — but he passed them by, for his eyes were *sharp* and his wits awake. And so, at last, he came to Gotham, his heart as free as the air he breathed, confessing that his quest had been in vain. History failed to repeat itself. His mother's romance would stand alone and shine without a flicker to the end of time. There could be no counterpart.

"Well, I had the fun of looking," he philosophised (to himself, for no man knew of his secret project) and grinned with a sort of amused tolerance for the sentimental side of his nature. "I'm a silly ass to have even dreamed of finding her as I passed along, and if I had found her what the deuce could I have done about it anyway? This isn't the day for mediæval lady-snatching. I dare say I'm just as well off for not having found her. I still have the zest

for hunting farther, and there's a lot in that." Then aloud: "Hobbs, are we on time?"

"We are, sir," said Hobbs, without even glancing at his watch. The train was passing 125th Street. "To the minute, sir. We will be in in ten minutes, if nothing happens. Mr. King will be at the station to meet you, sir. Any orders, sir?"

"Yes, pinch me, Hobbs."

"Pinch your Highness?" in amazement. "My word, sir, wot —"

"I just want to be sure that the dream is over, Hobbs. Never mind. You needn't pinch me. I'm awake," and to prove it he stretched his fine young body in the ecstasy of realisation.

That night he slept soundly in the Catskills.

CHAPTER III

MR. BLITHERS GOES VISITING

I REPEAT: Prince Robin was as handsome a chap as you'll see in a week's journey. He was just under six feet, slender, erect and strong in the way that a fine blade is strong. His hair was dark and straight, his eyes blue-black, his cheek brown and ruddy with the health of a life well-ordered. Nose, mouth and chin were clean-cut and indicative of power, while his brow was broad and smooth, with a surface so serene that it might have belonged to a woman. At first glance you would have taken him for a healthy, eager American athlete, just out of college, but that aforementioned seriousness in his deep-set, thoughtful eyes would have caused you to think twice before pronouncing him a fledgling. He had enjoyed life, he had made the most of his play-days, but always there had hung over his young head the shadow of the cross that would have to be supported to the end of his reign, through thick and thin, through joy and sorrow, through peace and strife.

He saw the shadow when he was little more than a baby; it was like a figure striding beside him always; it never left him. He could not be like other boys, for he was a prince, and it was a serious business being a prince! A thousand times, as a lad, he had wished that he could have a few "weeks off" from being what

he was and be just a common, ordinary, harum scarum boy, like the "kids" of Petrove, the head stableman. He would even have put up with the thrashings they got from their father, just for the sake of enjoying the mischief that purchased the punishment. But alas! no one would ever dream of giving him the lovely "tannings" that other boys got when they were naughty. Such joys were not for him; he was mildly reproved and that was all. But his valiant spirit found release in many a glorious though secret encounter with boys both large and small, and not infrequently he sustained severe pummelings at the hands of plebeians who never were quite sure that they wouldn't be beheaded for obliging him in the matter of a "scrap," but who fought like little wild-cats while they were about it. They were always fair fights, for he fought as a boy and not as a prince. He took his lickings like a prince, however, and his victories like a boy. The one thing he wanted to do above all others was to play foot-ball. But they taught him fencing, riding, shooting and tennis instead, for, said they, foot-ball is only to be looked-at, not played,— fine argument, said Robin!

Be that as it may, he was physically intact and bodily perfect. He had no broken nose, smashed ribs, stiff shoulder joints or weak ankles, nor was he toothless. In all his ambitious young life he had never achieved anything more enduring than a bloody nose, a cracked lip or a purple eye, and he had been compelled to struggle pretty hard for even those blessings.

And to him the pity of it all was that he was as hard as nails and as strong as a bullock — a sad waste, if one were to believe him in his bitter lamentations.

Toward the end of his first week at Red Roof, the summer home of the Truxton Kings, he might have been found on the broad lawn late one afternoon, playing tennis with his hostess, the lovely and vivacious "Aunt Loraine." To him, Mrs. King would always be "Aunt Loraine," even as he would never be anything but Bobby to her.

She was several years under forty and as light and active as a young girl. Her smooth cheek glowed with the happiness and thrill of the sport, and he was hard put to hold his own against her, even though she insisted that he play his level best.

Truxton King, stalwart and lazy, lounged on the turf, umpiring the game, attended by two pretty young girls, a lieutenant in flannels and the ceremonious Count Quinnox, iron grey and gaunt-faced battleman with the sabre scars on his cheek and the bullet wound in his side.

"Good work, Rainie," shouted the umpire as his wife safely placed the ball far out of her opponent's reach.

"Hi!" shouted Robin, turning on him with a scowl. "You're not supposed to cheer anybody, d' you understand? You're only an umpire."

"Outburst of excitement, Kid," apologised the umpire complacently. "Couldn't help it. Forty thirty. Get busy."

"He called him 'kid,'" whispered one of the young girls to the other.

"Well I heard the Prince call Mr. King 'Truck' a little while ago," whispered the other.

"Isn't he good-looking?" sighed the first one.

They were sisters, very young, and lived in the cottage across the road with their widowed mother. Their existence was quite unknown to Mr. and Mrs. Blithers, although the amiable Maud was rather nice to them. She had once picked them up in her automobile when she encountered them walking to the station. After that she called them by their Christian names and generously asked them to call her Maud. It might appear from this that Maud suffered somewhat from loneliness in the great house on the hill. The Felton girls had known Robin a scant three-quarters of an hour and were deeply in love with him. Fannie was eighteen and Nellie but little more than sixteen. He was their first Prince.

"Whee-ee!" shrilled Mrs. King, going madly after a return that her opponent had lobbed over the net. She missed.

"Deuce," said her husband laconically. A servant was crossing the lawn with a tray of iced drinks. As he neared the recumbent group he paused irresolutely and allowed his gaze to shift toward the road below. Then he came on and as he drew alongside the interested umpire he leaned over and spoke in a low tone of voice.

"What?" demanded King, squinting.

"Just coming in the gate, sir," said the footman.

King shot a glance over his shoulder and then sat up in astonishment.

"Good Lord! Blithers! What the deuce can he be doing here? I say, Loraine! Hi!"

"Vantage in," cried his pretty wife, dashing a stray lock from her eyes.

Mr. King's astonishment was genuine. It might better have been pronounced bewilderment. Mr. Blithers was paying his first visit to Red Roof. Up to this minute it is doubtful if he ever had accorded it so much as a glance of interest in passing. He bowed to King occasionally at the station, but that was all.

But now his manner was exceedingly friendly as he advanced upon the group. One might have been pardoned for believing him to be a most intimate friend of the family and given to constantly dropping in at any and all hours of the day.

The game was promptly interrupted. It would not be far from wrong to say that Mrs. King's pretty mouth was open not entirely as an aid to breathing. She couldn't believe her eyes as she slowly abandoned her court and came forward to meet their advancing visitor.

"Take my racket, dear," she said to one of the Feltons. It happened to be Fannie and the poor child almost fainted with joy.

The Prince remained in the far court, idly twirling his racket.

"Afternoon, King," said Mr. Blithers, doffing his panama — to fan a heated brow. "Been watching the game from the road for a spell. Out for a stroll. Couldn't resist running in for a minute. You play a beautiful game, Mrs. King. How do you do! Pretty hot work though, isn't it?"

He was shaking hands with King and smiling genially upon the trim, panting figure of the Prince's adversary.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Blithers," said King, still staring. "You — you know my wife?"

Mr. Blithers ignored what might have been regarded as an introduction, and blandly announced that tennis wasn't a game for fat people, patting his somewhat aggressive extension in mock dolefulness as he spoke.

"You should see my daughter play," he went on, scarcely heeding Mrs. King's tactless remark that she affected the game because she had a horror of getting fat. "Corking, she is, and as quick as a cat. Got a medal at Lakewood last spring. I'll fix up a match soon, Mrs. King, between you and Maud. Ought to be worth going miles to see, eh, King?"

"Oh, I am afraid, Mr. Blithers, that I am not in your daughter's class," said Loraine King, much too innocently.

"We've got a pretty fair tennis court up at Blitherwood," said Mr. Blithers calmly. "I have a professional instructor up every week to play with Maud. She can trim most of the amateurs so —"

"May I offer you a drink of some kind, Mr. Blithers?" asked King, recovering his poise to some extent. "We are having lemonades, but perhaps you'd prefer something —"

"Lemonade will do for me, thanks," said the visitor affably. "We ought to run in on each other a little more often than — thanks! By jove, it looks refreshing. Your health, Mrs. King. Too bad to drink a lady's health in lemonade but — the sentiment's the same."

He was looking over her shoulder at the bounding Prince in the far court as he spoke, and it seemed that he held his glass a trifle too high in proposing the toast.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Blithers," mumbled King. "Permit me to introduce Count Quinnox and Lieutenant Dank." Both of the foreigners had arisen and were standing very erect and soldierly a few yards away. "You know Miss Felton, of course."

"Delighted to meet you, Count," said Mr. Blithers, advancing with outstretched hand. He shook the hand of the lieutenant with a shade less energy. "Enjoying the game?"

"Immensely," said the Count. "It is rarely played so well."

Mr. Blithers affected a most dégagé manner, squinting carelessly at the Prince.

"That young chap plays a nice game. Who is he?"

The two Graustarkians stiffened perceptibly, and

waited for King to make the revelation to his visitor.

"That's Prince Robin of —" he began but Mr. Blithers cut him short with a genial wave of the hand.

"Of course," he exclaimed, as if annoyed by his own stupidity. "I did hear that you were entertaining a Prince. Slipped my mind, however. Well, well, we're coming up in the world, eh? — having a real nabob among us." He hesitated for a moment. "But don't let me interrupt the game," he went on, as if expecting King to end the contest in order to present the Prince to him.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Blithers?" said Mrs. King. "Or would you prefer a more comfortable chair on the porch? We —"

"No, thanks, I'll stay here if you don't mind," said he hastily, and dragged up the camp chair that Lieutenant Dank had been occupying.

"Fetch another chair, Lucas," said King to the servant. "And another glass of lemonade for Miss Felton."

"Felton?" queried Mr. Blithers, sitting down very carefully on the rather fragile chair, and hitching up his white flannel trousers at the knees to reveal a pair of purple socks, somewhat elementary in tone.

"We know your daughter, Mr. Blithers," said little Miss Nellie eagerly.

"I was just trying to remember —"

"We live across the road — over there in the little white house with the ivy —"

"— where I'd heard the name," proceeded Mr.

Blithers, still looking at the Prince. "By jove, I should think my daughter and the Prince would make a rattling good match. I mean," he added, with a boisterous laugh, "a good match at tennis. We'll have to get 'em together some day, eh, up at Blitherwood. How long is the Prince to be with you, Mrs. King?"

"It's rather uncertain, Mr. Blithers," said she, and no more.

Mr. Blithers fanned himself in patience for a moment or two. Then he looked at his watch.

"Getting along toward dinner-time up our way," he ventured. Everybody seemed rather intent on the game, which was extremely one-sided.

"Good work!" shouted King as Fannie Felton managed to return an easy service.

Lieutenant Dank applauded vigorously. "Splendid!" he cried out. "Capitally placed!"

"They speak remarkably good English, don't they?" said Mr. Blithers in an audible aside to Mrs. King. "Beats the deuce how quickly they pick it up."

She smiled. "Officers in the Graustark army are required to speak English, French and German, Mr. Blithers."

"It's a good idea," said he. "Maud speaks French and Italian like a native. She was educated in Paris and Rome, you know. Fact is, she's lived abroad a great deal."

"Is she at home now, Mr. Blithers?"

"Depends on what you'd call home, Mrs. King. We've got so many I don't know just which is the real one. If you mean Blitherwood, yes, she's there. Course, there's our town house in Madison Avenue, the place at Newport, one at Nice and one at Pasadena — California, you know — and a little shack in London. By the way, my wife says you live quite near our place in New York."

"We live in Madison Avenue, but it's a rather long street, Mr. Blithers. Just where is your house?" she inquired, rather spitefully.

He looked astonished. "You surely must know where the Blithers house is at —"

"Game!" shrieked Fannie Felton, tossing her racket in the air, a victor.

"They're through," said Mr. Blithers in a tone of relief. He shifted his legs and put his hands on his knees, suggesting a readiness to arise on an instant's notice.

"Shall we try another set?" called out the Prince.

"Make it doubles," put in Lieutenant Dank, and turned to Nellie. "Shall we take them on?"

And doubles it was, much to the disgust of Mr. Blithers. He sat through the nine games, manifesting an interest he was far from feeling, and then — as dusk fell across the valley — arose expectantly with the cry of "game and set." He had discoursed freely on the relative merits of various motor cars, stoutly maintaining that the one he drove was without question the best in the market (in fact, there wasn't an-

other "make" that he would have as a gift); the clubs he belonged to in New York were the only ones that were worth belonging to (he wouldn't be caught dead in any of the others); his tailor was the only tailor in the country who knew how to make a decent looking suit of clothes (the rest of them were "the limit"); the Pomeranian that he had given his daughter was the best dog of its breed in the world (he was looking at Mrs. King's Pomeranian as he made the remark); the tennis court at Blitherwood was pronounced by experts to be the finest they'd ever seen — and so on and so on, until the long-drawn-out set was ended.

To his utter amazement, at the conclusion of the game, the four players made a dash for the house without even so much as a glance in his direction. It was the Prince who shouted something that sounded like "now for a shower!" as he raced up the terrace, followed by the other participants.

Mr. Blithers said something violent under his breath, but resolutely retained his seat. It was King who glanced slyly at his watch this time, and subsequently shot a questioning look at his wife. She was frowning in considerable perplexity, and biting her firm red lips. Count Quinnox coolly arose and excused himself with the remark that he was off to dress for dinner. He also looked at his watch, which certainly was an act that one would hardly have expected of a diplomat.

"Well, well," said Mr. Blithers profoundly. Then

he looked at his own watch — and settled back in his chair, a somewhat dogged compression about his jaws. He was not the man to be thwarted. "You certainly have a cosy little place here, King," he remarked after a moment or two.

"We like it," said King, twiddling his fingers behind his back. "Humble but homelike."

"Mrs. Blithers has been planning to come over for some time, Mrs. King. I told her she oughtn't to put it off — be neighbourly, don't you know. That's me. I'm for being neighbourly with my neighbours. But women, they — well, you know how it is, Mrs. King. Always something turning up to keep 'em from doing the things they want to do most. And Mrs. Blithers has so many sociable obli — I beg pardon?"

"I was just wondering if you would stay and have dinner with us, Mr. Blithers," said she, utterly helpless. She couldn't look her husband in the eye — and it was quite fortunate that she was unable to do so, for it would have resulted in a laughing duet that could never have been explained.

"Why," said Mr. Blithers, arising and looking at his watch again, "bless my soul, it is *past* dinner time, isn't it? I had no idea it was so late. 'Pon my soul, it's good of you, Mrs. King. You see, we have dinner at seven up at Blitherwood and — I declare it's half-past now. I don't see where the time has gone. Thanks, I *will* stay if you really mean to be kind to a poor old beggar. Don't do anything extra on my account, though, just your regular dinner, you know.

No frills, if you please." He looked himself over in some uncertainty. "Will this rag of mine do?"

"We shan't notice it, Mr. Blithers," said she, and he turned the remark over in his mind several times as he walked beside her toward the house. Somehow it didn't sound just right to him, but for the life of him he couldn't tell why. "We are quite simple folk, you see," she went on desperately, making note of the fact that her husband lagged behind like the coward he was. "Red Roof is as nothing compared to Blitherwood, with its army of servants and —"

Mr. Blithers magnanimously said "Pooh!" and, continuing, remarked that he wouldn't say exactly how many they employed but he was sure there were not more than forty, including the gardeners. "Besides," he added gallantly, "what is an army of servants compared to the army of Grasstock? You've got the real article, Mrs. King, so don't you worry. But, I say, if necessary, I can telephone up to the house and have a dress suit sent down. It won't take fifteen minutes, Lou — er — Mrs. Blithers always has 'em laid out for me, in case of an emergency, and —"

"Pray do not think of it," she cried. "The men change, of course, after they've been playing tennis, but we — we — well, you see, you haven't been playing," she concluded, quite breathlessly.

At that instant the sprightly Feltons dashed pell mell down the steps and across the lawn homeward, shrieking something unintelligible to Mrs. King as they passed.

"Rather skittish," observed Mr. Blithers, glaring after them disapprovingly.

"They are dears," said Mrs. King.

"The — er — Prince attracted by either one of 'em?" he queried.

"He barely knows them, Mr. Blithers."

"I see. Shouldn't think they'd appeal to him. Rather light, I should say — I mean up here," and he tapped his forehead so that she wouldn't think that he referred to pounds and ounces. "I don't believe Maud knows 'em, as the little one said. Maud is rather —"

"It is possible they have mistaken some one else for your daughter," said she very gently.

"Impossible," said he with force.

"They are coming back here to dinner," she said, and her eyes sparkled with mischief. "I shall put you between them, Mr. Blithers. You will find that they are very bright, attractive girls."

"We'll see," said he succinctly.

King caught them up at the top of the steps. He seemed to be slightly out of breath.

"Make yourself at home, Mr. Blithers. I must get into something besides these duds I'm wearing," he said. "Would you like to — er — wash up while we're —"

"No, thanks," interposed Mr. Blithers. "I'm as clean as a whistle. Don't mind me, please. Run along and dress, both of you. I'll sit out here and —

count the minutes," the last with a very elaborate bow to Mrs. King.

"Dinner's at half-past eight," said she, and disappeared. Mr. Blithers recalled his last glance at his watch, and calculated that he would have at least fifty minutes to count, provided dinner was served promptly on the dot.

"You will excuse me if I leave you —"

"Don't mention it, old man," said the new guest, rather more curtly than he intended. "I'll take it easy."

"Shall I have the butler telephone to Blitherwood to say that you won't be home to dinner?"

"It would be better if he were to say that I *wasn't* home to dinner," said Mr. Blithers. "It's over by this time."

"Something to drink while you're —"

"No, thanks. I can wait," and he sat down.

"You don't mind my —"

"Not at all."

Mr. Blithers settled himself in the big porch chair and glowered at the shadowy hills on the opposite side of the valley. The little cottage of the Feltons came directly in his line of vision. He scowled more deeply than before. At the end of fifteen minutes he started up suddenly and, after a quick uneasy glance about him, started off across the lawn, walking more rapidly than was his wont.

He had remembered that his chauffeur was waiting

for him with the car just around a bend in the road — and had been waiting for two hours or more.

"Go home," he said to the man. "Come back at twelve. And don't use the cut-out going up that hill, either."

Later on, he met the Prince. Very warmly he shook the tall young man's hand,— he even gave it a prophetic second squeeze,— and said:

"I am happy to welcome you to the Catskills, Prince."

"Thank you," said Prince Robin.

CHAPTER IV

PROTECTING THE BLOOD

"A MOST extraordinary person," said Count Quinnox to King, after Mr. Blithers had taken his departure, close upon the heels of the Feltons who were being escorted home by the Prince and Dank. The venerable Graustarkian's heroic face was a study. He had just concluded a confidential hour in a remote corner of the library with the millionaire while the younger people were engaged in a noisy though temperate encounter with the roulette wheel at the opposite end of the room. "I've never met any one like him, Mr. King." He mopped his brow, and still looked a trifle dazed.

King laughed. "There isn't any one like him, Count. He is the one and only Blithers."

"He is very rich?"

"Millions and millions," said Mrs. King. "Didn't he tell you how many?"

"I am not quite sure. This daughter of his — is she attractive?"

"Rather. Why?"

"He informed me that her dot would be twenty millions if she married the right man. Moreover, she is his only heir. 'Pon my soul, Mrs. King, he quite took my breath away when he announced that he knew all about our predicament in relation to the

Russian loan. It really sounded quite — you might say significant. Does — does he imagine that — good heaven, it's almost stupefying!"

King smoked in silence for many seconds. There was a pucker of annoyance on his wife's fair brow as she stared reflectively through the window at the distant lights of Blitherwood, far up the mountain side.

"Sounds ominous to me," said King drily. "Is Bobby for sale?"

The Count favoured him with a look of horror. "My dear Mr. King!" Then as comprehension came, he smiled. "I see. No, he isn't for sale. He is a Prince, not a pawn. Mr. Blithers may be willing to buy but —" he proudly shook his head.

"He was feeling you out, however," said King, ruminating. "Planting the seed, so to speak."

"There is a rumour that she is to marry Count Lannet," said his wife. "A horrid creature. There was talk in the newspapers last winter of an Italian duke. Poor girl! From what I hear of her, she is rather a good sort, sensible and more genuinely American in her tastes than might be expected after her bringing-up. And she *is* pretty."

"How about this young Scoville, Rainie?"

"He's a nice boy but — he'll never get her. She is marked up too high for him. He doesn't possess so much as the title to an acre of land."

"Extraordinary, the way you Americans go after our titles," said the Count good-naturedly.

"No more extraordinary than the way you Europeans go after our money," was her retort.

"I don't know which is the cheaper, titles or money in these days," said King. "I understand one can get a most acceptable duke for three or four millions, a nice marquis or count for half as much, and a Sir on tick." He eyed the Count speculatively. "Of course a prince of the royal blood comes pretty high."

"Pretty high," said the Count grimly. He seemed to be turning something over in his mind "Your amazing Mr. Blithers further confided to me that he might be willing to take care of the Russian obligation for us if no one else turns up in time. As a matter of fact, without waiting for my reply, he said that he would have his lawyers look into the matter of security at once. I was somewhat dazed, but I think he said that it would be no trouble at all for him to provide the money himself and he would be glad to accommodate us if we had no other plan in mind. Amazing, amazing!"

"Of course, you told him it was not to be considered," said King sharply.

"I endeavoured to do so, but I fear he did not grasp what I was saying. Moreover, I tried to tell him that it was a matter I was not at liberty to discuss. He didn't hear that, either."

"He is not in the habit of hearing any one but himself, I fear," said King.

"I am afraid poor Robin is in jeopardy," said his wife, ruefully. "The Bogieman is after him."

"Does the incomprehensible creature imagine —" began the Count loudly, and then found it necessary to pull his collar away from his throat as if to save himself from immediate strangulation.

"Mr. Blithers is not blessed with an imagination, Count," said she. "He doesn't imagine anything."

"If he should presume to insult our Prince by —" grated the old soldier, very red in the face and erect —"if he should presume to —" Words failed him and an instant later he was laughing, but somewhat uncertainly, with his amused host and hostess.

Mr. Blithers reached home in high spirits. His wife was asleep, but he awoke her without ceremony.

"I say, Lou, wake up. Got some news for you. We'll have a prince in the family before you can say Jack Robinson."

She sat up in bed, blinking with dismay. "In heaven's name, Will, what have you been doing? What *have* you been —"

"Cutting bait," said he jovially. "In a day or two I'll throw the hook in, and you'll see what I land. He's as good as caught right now, but we'll let him nibble a while before we jerk. And say, he's a corker, Lou. Finest young fellow I've seen in many a day. He —"

"You don't mean to say that you — you actually said anything to him about — about — Oh, my God, Will, don't tell me that you were crazy enough to —" cried the poor woman, almost in tears.

"Now cool down, cool down," he broke in sooth-

ingly. "I'm no fool, Lou. Trust me to do the fine work in a case like this. Sow the right kind of seeds and you'll get results every time. I merely dropped a few hints, that's all,— and in the right direction, believe me. Count Equinox will do the rest. I'll bet my head we'll have this prince running after Maud so —"

"What *did* you say?" she demanded. There was a fine moisture on her upper lip. He sat down on the edge of the bed and talked for half an hour without interruption. When he came to the end of his oration, she turned over with her face to the wall and fairly sobbed: "What will the Kings think of us? What will they think?"

"Who the dickens cares what the Kings think?" he roared, perfectly aghast at the way she took it. "Who are the Kings? Tell me that! who are they?"

"I — I can't bear to talk about it. Go to bed."

He wiped his brow helplessly. "You beat anything I've ever seen. What's the matter with you? Don't you want this prince for Maud? Well, then, what the deuce are you crying about? You said you wanted him, didn't you? Well, I'm going to get him. If I say I'll do a thing, you can bet your last dollar I'll do it. That's the kind of a man William W. Blithers is. You leave it to me. There's only one way to land these foreign noblemen, and I'm —"

She faced him once more, and angrily. "Listen to me," she said. "I've had a talk with Maud. She has gone to bed with a splitting headache and I'm

not surprised. Don't you suppose the poor child has a particle of pride? She guessed at once just what you had gone over there for and she cried her eyes out. Now she declares she will never be able to look the Prince in the face, and as for the Kings — Oh, it's sickening. Why can't you leave these things to me? You go about like a bull in a china shop. You might at least have waited until the poor child had an opportunity to see the man before rushing in with your talk about money. She —"

"Confound it, Lou, don't blame me for everything. We all three agreed at lunch that he was a better bargain than this measly count we've been considering. Maud says she won't marry the count, anyhow, and she *did* say that if this prince was all that he's cracked up to be, she wouldn't mind being the Princess of Groostock. You can't deny that, Lou. You heard her say it. You —"

"She didn't say Groostock," said his wife shortly. "And you forget that she said she wouldn't promise anything until she'd met him and decided whether she liked him."

"She'll like him all right," said he confidently.

"She will refuse to even meet him, if she hears of your silly blunder to-night."

"Refuse to meet him?" gasped Mr. Blithers.

"I may be able to reason with her, Will, but — but she's stubborn, as well you know. I'm afraid you've spoiled everything."

His face brightened. Lowering his voice to a half

whisper, he said: "We needn't tell her what I said to that old chap, Lou. Just let her think I sat around like a gump and never said a word to anybody. We can —"

"But she'll pin you down, Will, and you know you can't lie with a straight face."

"Maybe — maybe I'd better run down to New York for a few days," he muttered unhappily. "You can square it better than I can."

"In other words, I can lie with a straight face," she said ironically.

"I never thought she'd balk like this," said he, ignoring the remark.

"I fancy you'd better go to New York," she said mercilessly.

"I've got business there anyhow," muttered he. "I — I think I'll go before she's up in the morning."

"You can save yourself a bad hour or two if you leave before breakfast," said she levelly.

"Get around her some way, Lou," he pleaded. "Tell her I'm sorry I had to leave so early, and — and that I love her better than anything on earth, and that I'll be back the end of the week. If — if she wants anything in New York, just have her wire me. You say she cried?"

"She did, and I don't blame her."

Mr. Blithers scowled. "Well — well, you see if you can do any better than I did. Arrange it somehow for them to meet. She'll — she'll like him and then — by George, she'll thank us both for the inter-

est we take in her future. It wouldn't surprise me if she fell in love with him right off the reel. And you may be sure he'll fall in love with her. He can't help it. The knowledge that she'll have fifty millions some day won't have anything to do with his feeling for her, once he —"

"Don't mention the word millions again, Will Blithers."

"All right," said he, more humbly than he knew. "But listen to this, old girl; I'm going to get this prince for her if it's the last act of my life. I never failed in anything and I won't fail in this."

"Well, go to bed, dear, and don't worry. I may be able to undo the mischief. It — it isn't hopeless, of course."

"I'll trust you, Lou, to do your part. Count on me to do mine when the time comes. And I still insist that I have sowed the right sort of seed to-night. You'll see. Just wait."

Sure enough, Mr. Blithers was off for New York soon after daybreak the next morning, and with him went a mighty determination to justify himself before the week was over. His wily brain was working as it had never worked before.

Two days later, Count Quinnox received a message from New York bearing the distressing information that the two private banking institutions on which he had been depending for aid in the hour of trouble had decided that it would be impossible for them to make the loan under consideration. The financial agents

who had been operating in behalf of the Graustark government confessed that they were unable to explain the sudden change of heart on the part of the bankers, inasmuch as the negotiations practically had been closed with them. The decision of the directors was utterly incomprehensible under the circumstances.

Vastly disturbed, Count Quinnox took the first train to New York, accompanied by Truxton King, who was confident that outside influences had been brought to bear upon the situation, influences inimical to Graustark. Both were of the opinion that Russia had something to do with it, although the negotiations had been conducted with all the secrecy permissible in such cases.

"We may be able to get to the banks through Blithers," said King.

"How could he possibly be of assistance to us?" the Count inquired.

"He happens to be a director in both concerns, besides being such a power in the financial world that his word is almost law when it comes to the big deals."

All the way down to the city Count Quinnox was thoughtful, even pre-occupied. They were nearing the Terminal when he leaned over and, laying his hand on King's knee, said, after a long interval of silence between them:

"I suppose you know that Graustark has not given up hope that Prince Robin may soon espouse the daughter of our neighbour, Dawsbergen."

King gave him a queer look. "By jove, that's

odd. I was thinking of that very thing when you spoke."

"The union would be of no profit to us in a pecuniary way, my friend," explained the Count. "Still it is most desirable for other reasons. Dawsbergen is not a rich country, nor are its people progressive. The reigning house, however, is an old one and rich in traditions. Money, my dear King, is not everything in this world. There are some things it cannot buy. It is singularly ineffective when opposed to an honest sentiment. Even though the young Princess were to come to Graustark without a farthing, she would still be hailed with the wildest acclaim. We are a race of blood worshippers, if I may put it in that way. She represents a force that has dominated our instincts for a great many centuries, and we are bound hand and foot, heart and soul, by the so-called fetters of imperialism. We are fierce men, but we bend the knee and we wear the yoke because the sword of destiny is in the hand that drives us. To-day we are ruled by a prince whose sire was not of the royal blood. I do not say that we deplore this infusion, but it behooves us to protect the original strain. We must conserve our royal blood. Our prince assumes an attitude of independence that we find difficult to overcome. He is prepared to defy an old precedent in support of a new one. In other words, he points out the unmistakably happy union of his own mother, the late Princess Yetive, and the American Lorry, and it is something we cannot go

behind. He declares that his mother set an example that he may emulate without prejudice to his country if he is allowed a free hand in choosing his mate.

"But we people of Graustark cannot look with complaisance on the possible result of his search for a sharer of the throne. Traditions must be upheld — or we die. True, the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen has American blood in her veins but her sire is a prince royal. Her mother, as you know, was an American girl. She who sits on the throne with Robin must be a princess by birth or the grip on the sword of destiny is weakened and the dynasty falters. I know what is in your mind. You are wondering why our Prince should not wed one of your fabulously rich American girls —"

"My dear Count," said King warmly, "I am not thinking anything of the sort. Naturally I am opposed to your pre-arranged marriages and all that sort of thing, but still I appreciate what it means as a safe-guard to the crown you support. I sincerely hope that Robin may find his love-mate in the small circle you draw for him, but I fear it isn't likely. He is young, romantic, impressionable, and he abhors the thought of marriage without love. He refuses to even consider the princess you have picked out for him. Time may prove to him that his ideals are false and he may resign himself to the — I was about to say the inevitable."

"Inevitable is the word, Mr. King," said Count Quinnox grimly. "'Pon my word, sir, I don't know

what our princes and princesses are coming to in these days. There seems to be a perfect epidemic of independence among them. They marry whom they please in spite of royal command, and the courts of Europe are being shorn of half their glory. It wouldn't surprise me to see an American woman on the throne of England one of these days. 'Gad, sir, you know what happened in Axphain two years ago. Her crown prince renounced the throne and married a French singer."

"And they say he is a very happy young beggar," said King drily.

"It is the prerogative of fools to be happy," said Count Quinnox.

"Not so with princes, eh?"

"It is a duty with princes, Mr. King."

They had not been in New York City an hour before they discovered that William W. Blithers was the man to whom they would have to appeal if they expected to gain a fresh hearing with the banks. The agents were in a dismal state of mind. The deal had been blocked no later than the afternoon of the day before and at a time when everything appeared to be going along most swimmingly. Blithers was the man to see; he and he alone could bring pressure to bear on the directorates that might result in a reconsideration of the surprising verdict. Something had happened during the day to alter the friendly attitude of the banks; they were now politely reluctant, as one of the agents expressed it, which really meant

that opposition to the loan had appeared from some unexpected source, as a sort of eleventh hour obstacle. The heads of the two banks had as much as said that negotiations were at an end, that was the long and short of it; it really didn't matter what was back of their sudden change of front, the fact still remained that the transaction was as "dead as a door nail" unless it could be revived by the magnetic touch of a man like Blithers.

"What can have happened to cause them to change their minds so abruptly?" cried the perplexed Count. "Surely our prime minister and the cabinet have left nothing undone to convince them of Graustark's integrity and —"

"Pardon me, Count," interrupted one of the brokers, "shall I try to make an appointment for you with Mr. Blithers? I hear he is in town for a few days."

Count Quinnox looked to Truxton King for inspiration and that gentleman favoured him with a singularly dis-spiriting nod of the head. The old Graustarkian cleared his throat and rather stiffly announced that he would receive Mr. Blithers if he would call on him at the Ritz that afternoon.

"What!" exclaimed both agents, half-starting from their chairs in amazement.

The Count stared hard at them. "You may say to him that I will be in at four."

"He'll tell you to go to — ahem!" The speaker coughed just in time. "Blithers isn't in the habit of

going out of his way to — to oblige anybody. He wouldn't do it for the Emperor of Germany."

"But," said the Count with a frosty smile, "I am not the Emperor of Germany."

"Better let me make an appointment for you to see him at his office. It's just around the corner." There was a pleading note in the speaker's voice.

"You might save your face, Calvert, by saying that the Count will be pleased to have him take tea with him at the Ritz," suggested King.

"Tea!" exclaimed Calvert scornfully. "Blithers doesn't drink the stuff."

"It's a figure of speech," said King patiently.

"All right, I'll telephone," said the other dubiously.

He came back a few minutes later with a triumphant look in his eye.

"Blithers says to tell Count Quinnox he'll see him to-morrow morning at half-past eight at his office. Sorry he's engaged this afternoon."

"But did you say I wanted him to have tea with us!" demanded the Count, an angry flush leaping to his cheek.

"I did. I'm merely repeating what he said in reply. Half-past eight, at his office, Count. Those were his words."

"It is the most brazen exhibition of insolence I've ever —" began the Count furiously, but checked himself with an effort. "I — I hope you did not say that I would come, sir!"

"Yes. It's the only way —"

"Well, be good enough to call him up again and say to him that I'll — I'll see him damned before I'll come to his office to-morrow at eight-thirty or at any other hour." And with that the Count got up and stalked out of the office, putting on his hat as he did so.

"Count," said King, as they descended in the elevator, "I've got an idea in my head that Blithers will be at the Ritz at four."

"Do you imagine, sir, that I will receive him?"

"Certainly. Are you not a diplomat?"

"I am a Minister of War," said the Count, and his scowl was an indication of absolute proficiency in the science.

"And what's more," went on King, reflectively, "it wouldn't in the least surprise me if Blithers is the man behind the directors in this sudden move of the banks."

"My dear King, he displayed the keenest interest and sympathy the other night at your house. He —"

"Of course I may be wrong," admitted King, but his brow was clouded.

Shortly after luncheon that day, Mrs. Blithers received a telegram from her husband. It merely stated that he was going up to have tea with the Count at four o'clock, and not to worry as "things were shaping themselves nicely."

CHAPTER V

PRINCE ROBIN IS ASKED TO STAND UP

LATE the same evening, Prince Robin, at Red Roof, received a long distance telephone communication from New York City. The Count was on the wire. He imparted the rather startling news that William W. Blithers had volunteered to take care of the loan out of his own private means! Quinnox was cabling the Prime Minister for advice and would remain in New York for further conference with the capitalist, who, it was to be assumed, would want time to satisfy himself as to the stability of Graustark's resources.

Robin was jubilant. The thought had not entered his mind that there could be anything sinister in this amazing proposition of the great financier.

If Count Quinnox himself suspected Mr. Blithers of an ulterior motive, the suspicion was rendered doubtful by the evidence of sincerity on the part of the capitalist who professed no sentiment in the matter but insisted on the most complete indemnification by the Graustark government. Even King was impressed by the absolute fairness of the proposition. Mr. Blithers demanded no more than the banks were asking for in the shape of indemnity; a first lien mortgage for 12 years on all properties owned and controlled by the government and the deposit of all bonds

held by the people with the understanding that the interest would be paid to them regularly, less a small per cent as commission. His protection would be complete,— for the people of Graustark owned fully four-fifths of the bonds issued by the government for the construction of public service institutions; these by consent of Mr. Blithers were to be limited to three utilities: railroads, telegraph and canals. These properties, as Mr. Blithers was by way of knowing, were absolutely sound and self-supporting. According to his investigators in London and Berlin, they were as solid as Gibraltar and not in need of one-tenth the protection required by the famous rock.

Robin inquired whether he was to come to New York at once in relation to the matter, and was informed that it would not be necessary at present. In fact, Mr. Blithers preferred to let the situation remain in statu quo (as he expressed it to the Count), until it was determined whether the people were willing to deposit their bonds, a condition which was hardly worth while worrying about in view of the fact that they had already signified their readiness to present them for security in the original proposition to the banks. Mr. Blithers, however, would give himself the pleasure of calling upon the Prince at Red Roof later in the week, when the situation could be discussed over a dish of tea or a cup of lemonade. That is precisely the way Mr. Blithers put it.

The next afternoon Mrs. Blithers left cards at Red Roof — or rather, the foot-man left them — and

on the day following the Kings and their guests received invitations to a ball at Blitherwood on the ensuing Friday, but four days off. While Mrs. King and the two young men were discussing the invitation the former was called to the telephone. Mrs. Blithers herself was speaking.

"I hope you will pardon me for calling you up, Mrs. King, but I wanted to be sure that you can come on the seventeenth. We want so much to have the Prince and his friends with us. Mr. Blithers has taken a great fancy to Prince Robin and Count Quinnox, and he declares the whole affair will be a fiasco if they are not to be here."

"It is good of you to ask us, Mrs. Blithers. The Prince is planning to leave for Washington within the next few days and I fear —"

"Oh, you must prevail upon him to remain over, my dear Mrs. King. We are to have a lot of people up from Newport and Tuxedo — you know the crowd — it's the *real* crowd — and I'm sure he will enjoy meeting them. Mr. Blithers has arranged for a special train to bring them up — a train de luxe, you may be sure, both as to equipment and occupant. Zabo's orchestra, too. A notion seized us last night to give the ball, which accounts for the short notice. It's the way we do everything — on a minute's notice. I think they're jollier if one doesn't go through the agony of a month's preparation, don't you? Nearly every one has wired acceptance, so we're sure to have

a lot of nice people. Loads of girls,— you know the ones I mean,— and Mr. Blithers is trying to arrange a sparring match between those two great prize-fighters,— you know the ones, Mrs. King,— just to give us poor women a chance to see what a real man looks like in — I mean to say, what marvellous specimens they are, don't you know. Now please tell the Prince that he positively cannot afford to miss a real sparring match. Every one is terribly excited over it, and naturally we are keeping it very quiet. Won't it be a lark? My daughter thinks it's terrible, but she is finicky. One of them is a negro, isn't he? "

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You can imagine how splendid they must be when I tell you that Mr. Blithers is afraid they won't come up for less than fifteen thousand dollars. Isn't it ridiculous? "

"Perfectly," said Mrs. King.

"Of course, we shall insist on the Prince receiving with us. He is our *piece de resistance.* You —"

"I'm sure it will be awfully jolly, Mrs. Blithers. What did you say? "

"I beg pardon? "

"I'm sorry. I was speaking to the Prince. He just called up stairs to me."

"What does he say? "

"It was really nothing. He was asking about Hobbs."

"Hobbs? Tell him, please, that if he has any friends he would like to have invited we shall be only too proud to —"

"Oh, thank you! I'll tell him."

"You must not let him go away before —"

"I shall try my best, Mrs. Blithers. It is awfully kind of you to ask us to —"

"You must all come up to dinner either to-morrow night or the night after. I shall be so glad if you will suggest anything that can help us to make the ball a success. You see, I know how terribly clever you are, Mrs. King."

"I am dreadfully stupid."

"Nonsense!"

"I'm sorry to say we're dining out to-morrow night and on Thursday we are having some people here for —"

"Can't you bring them all up to Blitherwood? We'd be delighted to have them, I'm sure."

"I'm afraid I couldn't manage it. They — well, you see, they are in mourning."

"Oh, I see. Well, perhaps Maud and I could run in and see you for a few minutes to-morrow or next day, just to talk things over a little — what's that, Maud? I beg your pardon, Mrs. King. Ahem! Well, I'll call you up to-morrow, if you don't mind being bothered about a silly old ball. Good-bye. Thank you so much."

Mrs. King confronted Robin in the lower hall a few seconds later and roundly berated him for shouting

up the steps that Hobbs ought to be invited to the ball. Prince Robin rolled on a couch and roared with delight. Lieutenant Dank, as became an officer of the Royal Guard, stood at attention — in the bow window with his back to the room, very red about the ears and rigid to the bursting point.

"I suppose, however, we'll have to keep on the good side of the Blithers syndicate," said Robin soberly, after his mirth and subsided before her wrath. "Good Lord, Aunt Loraine, I simply cannot go up there and stand in line like a freak in a side show for all the ladies and girls to gape at. I'll get sick the day of the party, that's what I'll do, and you can tell 'em how desolated I am over my misfortune."

"They've got their eyes on you, Bobby," she said flatly. "You can't escape so easily as all that. If you're not very, very careful they'll have you married to the charming Miss Maud before you can say Jack Rabbit."

"Think that's their idea?"

"Unquestionably."

He stretched himself lazily. "Well, it may be that she's the very one I'm looking for, Auntie. Who knows?"

"You silly boy!"

"She may be the Golden Girl in every sense of the term," said he lightly. "You say she's pretty?"

"My notion of beauty and yours may not agree at all."

"That's not an answer."

"Well, I consider her to be a very good-looking girl."

"Blonde?"

"Mixed. Light brown hair and very dark eyes and lashes. A little taller than I, more graceful and a splendid horse-woman. I've seen her riding."

"Astride?"

"No. I've seen her in a ball gown, too. Most men think she's stunning."

"Well, let's have a game of billiards," said he, dismissing Maud in a way that would have caused the proud Mr. Blithers to reel with indignation.

A little later on, at the billiard table, Mrs. King remarked, apropos of nothing and quite out of a clear sky, so to speak:

"And she'll do anything her parents command her to do, that's the worst of it."

"What are you talking about? It's your shot."

"If they order her to marry a title, she'll do it. That's the way she's been brought up, I'm afraid."

"Meaning Maud?"

"Certainly. Who else? Poor thing, she hasn't a chance in the world, with that mother of hers."

"Shoot, please. Mark up six for me, Dank."

"Wait till you see her, Bobby."

"All right. I'll wait," said he cheerfully.

The next day Count Quinnox and King returned from the city, coming up in a private car with Mr. Blithers himself.

"I'll have Maud drive me over this afternoon," said Mr. Blithers, as they parted at the station.

But Maud did not drive him over that afternoon. The pride, joy and hope of the Blithers family flatly refused to be a party of any such arrangement, and set out for a horse-back ride in a direction that took her as far away from Red Roof as possible.

"What's come over the girl?" demanded Mr. Blithers, completely non-plused. "She's never acted like this before, Lou."

"Some silly notion about being made a laughing-stock, I gather," said his wife. "Heaven knows I've talked to her till I'm utterly worn out. She says she won't be bullied into even meeting the Prince, much less marrying him. I've never known her to be so pig-headed. Usually I can make her see things in a sensible way. She would have married the duke, I'm sure, if — if you hadn't put a stop to it on account of his so-called habits. She —"

"Well, it's turned out for the best, hasn't it? Isn't a prince better than a duke?"

"You've said all that before, Will. I wanted her to run down with me this morning to talk the ball over with Mrs. King, and what do you think happened?"

"She wouldn't go?"

"Worse than that. She wouldn't let *me* go. Now, things are coming to a pretty pass when —"

"Never mind. I'll talk to her," said Mr. Blithers,

somewhat bleakly despite his confident front. "She loves her old dad. I can do *anything* with her."

"She's on a frightfully high horse lately," sighed Mrs. Blithers fretfully. "It — it can't be that young Scoville, can it?"

"If I thought it was, I'd — I'd —" There is no telling what Mr. Blithers would have done to young Scoville, at the moment, for he couldn't think of anything dire enough to inflict upon the suspected meddler.

"In any event, it's dreadfully upsetting to me, Will. She — she won't listen to anything. And here's something else: She declares she won't stay here for the ball on Friday night."

Mr. Blithers had her repeat it, and then almost missed the chair in sitting down, he was so precipitous about it.

"Won't stay for her own ball?" he bellowed.

"She says it isn't her ball," lamented his wife.

"If it isn't hers, in the name of God whose is it?"

"Ask her, not me," flared Mrs. Blithers. "And don't glare at me like that. I've had nothing but glares since you went away. I thought I was doing the very nicest thing in the world when I suggested the ball. It would bring them together —"

"The only two it will actually bring together, it seems, are those damned prize-fighters. They'll get together all right, but what good is it going to do us, if Maud's going to act like this? See here, Lou, I've

got things fixed so that the Prince of Groostuck can't very well do anything but ask Maud to —"

"That's just it!" she exclaimed. "Maud sees through the whole arrangement, Will. She said last night that she wouldn't be at all surprised if you offered to assume Graustark's debt to Russia in order to —"

"That's just what I've done, old girl," said he in triumph. "I'll have 'em sewed up so tight by next week that they can't move without asking me to loosen the strings. And you can tell Maud once more for me that I'll get this Prince for her if —"

"But she doesn't want him!"

"She doesn't know what she wants!" he roared. "Where is she going?"

"You saw her start off on Katydid, so why —"

"I mean on the day of the ball."

"To New York."

"By gad, I'll — I'll see about *that*," he grated. "I'll see that she doesn't leave the grounds if I have to put guards at every gate. She's got to be reasonable. What does she think I'm putting sixteen millions into the Grasstork treasury for? She's got to stay here for the ball. Why, it would be a crime for her to — but what's the use talking about it? She'll be here and she'll lead the grand march with the Prince. I've got it all —"

"Well, you'll have to talk to her. I've done all that I can do. She swears she won't marry a man she's never seen."

"Ain't we trying to show him to her?" he snorted. "She won't have to marry him till she's seen him, and when she does see him she'll apologise to me for all the nasty things she's been saying about me." For a moment it looked as though Mr. Blithers would dissolve into tears, so suddenly was he afflicted by self-pity. "By the way, didn't she like the necklace I sent up to her from Tiffany's?"

"I suppose so. She said you were a dear old foozler."

"Foozler? What's that mean?" He wasn't quite sure, but somehow it sounded like a term of opprobrium.

"I haven't the faintest idea," she said shortly.

"Well, why didn't you ask her? You've had charge of her bringing up. If she uses a word that you don't know the meaning of, you ought to —"

"Are you actually going to lend all that money to Graustark?" she cut in.

He glared at her uncertainly for a moment and then nodded his head. The words wouldn't come.

"Are you not a trifle premature about it?" she demanded with deep significance in her manner.

This time he did not nod his head, nor did he shake it. He simply got up and walked out of the room. Half way across the terrace he stopped short and said it with a great fervour and instantly felt very much relieved. In fact, the sensation of relief was so pleasant that he repeated it two or three times and then had to explain to a near by gardener that he

didn't mean him at all. Then he went down to the stables. All the grooms and stableboys came tumbling into the stable yard in response to his thunderous shout.

"Saddle Red Rover, and be quick about it," he commanded.

"Going out, sir?" asked the head groom, touching his fore-lock.

"I am," said Mr. Blithers succinctly and with a withering glare. Red Rover must have been surprised by the unusual celerity with which he was saddled and bridled. If there could be such a thing as a horse looking shocked, that beast certainly betrayed himself as he was yanked away from his full manger and hustled out to the mounting block.

"Which way did Miss Blithers go?" demanded Mr. Blithers, in the saddle. Two grooms were clumsily trying to insert his toes into the stirrups, at the same time pulling down his trousers legs, which had a tendency to hitch up in what seemed to them a most exasperating disregard for form. To their certain knowledge, Mr. Blithers had never started out before without boot and spur; therefore, the suddenness of his present sortie sank into their intellects with overwhelming impressiveness.

"Down the Cutler road, sir, three quarters of an hour ago. She refused to have a groom go along, sir."

"Get ap!" said Mr. Blithers, and almost ran down a groom in his rush for the gate. For the information of the curious, it may be added that he did not

overtake his daughter until she had been at home for half an hour, but he was gracious enough to admit to himself that he had been a fool to pursue a stern chase rather than to intercept her on the back road home, which *any* fool might have known she would take.

His wife came upon him a few minutes later while he was feverishly engaged in getting into his white flannels.

"Tell Maud I'm going over to have tea with the Prince," he grunted, without looking up from the shoe lace he was tying in a hard knot. "I want her to go with me in fifteen minutes. Told 'em I would bring her over to play tennis. Tell her to put on tennis clothes. Hurry up, Lou. Where's my watch? What time is it? For God's sake, look at the watch, not at me! I'm not a clock! What?"

"Mrs. King called up half an hour ago to say that they were all motoring over to the Grandby Tavern for tea and wouldn't be back till half-past seven —"

He managed to look up at that. For a moment he was speechless. No one had ever treated him like this before.

"Well, I'll be — hanged! Positive engagement. But's it's all right," he concluded resolutely. "I can motor to Grandby Tavern, too, can't I? Tell Maud not to mind tennis clothes, but to hurry. Want to go along?"

"No, I don't," she said emphatically. "And Maud isn't going, either."

"She isn't, eh?"

"No, she isn't. Can't you leave this affair to me?"

"I'm pretty hot under the collar," he warned her, and it was easy to believe that he was.

"Don't rush in where angels fear to tread, Will dear," she pleaded. It was so unusual for her to adopt a pleading tone that he overlooked the implication. Besides he had just got through calling himself a fool, so perhaps she was more or less justified. Moreover, at that particular moment she undertook to assist him with his necktie. Her soft, cool fingers touched his double chin and seemed to caress it lovingly. He lifted his head very much as a dog does when he is being tickled on that velvety spot under the lower jaw.

"Stuff and nonsense," he murmured throatily.

"I thought you would see it that way," she said so calmly that he blinked a couple of times in sheer perplexity and then diminished his double chin perceptibly by a very helpful screwing up of his lower lip. He said nothing, preferring to let her think that the most important thing in the world just then was the proper adjustment of the wings of his necktie. "There!" she said, and patted him on the cheek, to show that the task had been successfully accomplished.

"Better come along for a little spin," he said, readjusting the tie with man-like ingenuousness. "Do you good, Lou."

"Very well," she said. "Can you wait a few minutes?"

"Long as you like," said he graciously. "Ask Maud if she wants to come, too."

"I am sure she will enjoy it," said his wife, and then Mr. Blithers descended to the verandah to think. Somehow he felt if he did a little more thinking perhaps matters wouldn't be so bad. Among other things, he thought it would be a good idea not to motor in the direction of Grandby Tavern. And he also thought it was not worth while resenting the fact that his wife and daughter took something over an hour to prepare for the little spin.

In the meantime, Prince Robin was racing over the mountain roads in a high-power car, attended by a merry company of conspirators whose sole object was to keep him out of the clutches of that far-reaching octopus, William W. Blithers.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCE AND MR. BLITHERS

In order to get on with the narrative, I shall be as brief as possible in the matter of the Blitherwood ball. In the first place, mere words would prove to be not only feeble but actually out of place. Any attempt to define the sensation of awe by recourse to a dictionary would put one in the ridiculous position of seeking the unattainable. The word has its meaning, of course, but the sensation itself is quite another thing. As every one who attended the ball was filled with awe, which he tried to put forward as admiration, the attitude of the guest was no more limp than that of the chronicler. In the second place, I am not qualified by experience or imagination to describe a ball that stood its promoter not a penny short of one hundred thousand dollars. I believe I could go as high as a fifteen or even twenty thousand dollar affair with some sort of intelligence, but anything beyond those figures renders me void and useless.

Mr. Blithers not only ran a special train de luxe from New York City, but another from Washington and still another from Newport, for it appears that the Newporters at the last minute couldn't bear the idea of going to the Metropolis out of season. He actually had to take them around the city in such a

way that they were not even obliged to submit to a glimpse of the remotest outskirts of the Bronx.

From Washington came an amazing company of foreign ladies and gentlemen, ranging from the most exalted Europeans to the lowliest of the yellow races. They came with gold all over them; they tinkled with the clash of a million cymbals. The President of the United States almost came. Having no spangles of his own, he delegated a Major-General and a Rear-Admiral to represent Old Glory, and no doubt sulked in the White House because a parsimonious nation refuses to buy braid and buttons for its chief executive.

Any one who has seen a gentleman in braid, buttons and spangles will understand how impossible it is to describe him. One might enumerate the buttons and the spangles and even locate them precisely upon his person, but no mortal intellect can expand sufficiently to cope with an undertaking that would try even the powers of Him who created the contents of those well-stuffed uniforms.

A car load of orchids and gardenias came up, fairly depleting the florists' shops on Manhattan Island, and with them came a small army of skilled decorators. In order to deliver his guests at the doors of Blitherwood, so to speak, the incomprehensible Mr. Blithers had a temporary spur of track laid from the station two miles away, employing no fewer than a thousand men to do the work in forty-eight hours. (Work on a terminal extension in New York was delayed for a

week or more in order that he might borrow the rails, ties and worktrains!)

Two hundred and fifty precious and skillfully selected guests ate two hundred and fifty gargantuan dinners and twice as many suppers; drank barrels of the rarest of wines; smoked countless two dollar Perfectos and stuffed their pockets with enough to last them for days to come; burnt up five thousand cigarettes and ate at least two dozen eggs for breakfast, and then flitted away with a thousand complaints in two hundred and fifty Pullman drawing-rooms. Nothing could have been more accurately pulled-off than the wonderful Blitherwood ball. (The sparring match on the lawn, under the glare of a stupendous cluster of lights, resulted in favour of Mr. Bullhead Brown, who successfully — if accidentally — landed with considerably energy on the left lower corner of Mr. Sledge-hammer Smith's diaphragm, completely dividing the purse with him in four scientifically satisfactory rounds, although they came to blows over it afterwards when Mr. Smith told Mr. Brown what he thought of him for hitting with such fervour just after they had eaten a hearty meal.)

A great many mothers inspected Prince Robin with interest and confessed to a really genuine enthusiasm: something they had not experienced since one of the German princes got close enough to Newport to see it quite clearly through his marine glasses from the bridge of a battleship. The ruler of Graustark — (four-fifths of the guests asked where in the world it

was!)—was the lion of the day. Mr. Blithers was annoyed because he did not wear his crown, but was somewhat mollified by the information that he had neglected to bring it along with him in his travels. He was also considerably put out by the discovery that the Prince had left his white and gold uniform at home and had to appear in an ordinary dress-suit, which, to be sure, fitted him perfectly but did not achieve distinction. He did wear a black and silver ribbon across his shirt front, however, and a tiny gold button in the lapel of his coat; otherwise he might have been mistaken for a "regular guest," to borrow an expression from Mr. Blithers. The Prince's host manœuvred until nearly one o'clock in the morning before he succeeded in getting a close look at the little gold button, and then found that the inscription thereon was in some sort of hieroglyphics that afforded no enlightenment whatsoever.

Exercising a potentate's prerogative, Prince Robin left the scene of festivity somewhat earlier than was expected. As a matter of fact, he departed shortly after one. Moreover, being a prince, it did not occur to him to offer any excuse for leaving so early, but gracefully thanked his host and hostess and took himself off without the customary assertion that he had had a splendid time. Strange to say, he did not offer a single comment on the sumptuousness of the affair that had been given in his honor. Mr. Blithers couldn't get over that. He couldn't help thinking that the fellow had not been properly brought-up,

or was it possible that he was not in the habit of going out in good society?

Except for one heart-rending incident, the Blitherwood ball was the most satisfying event in the lives of Mr. and Mrs. William W. Blithers. That incident, however, happened to be the hasty and well-managed flight of Maud Applegate Blithers at an hour indefinitely placed somewhere between four and seven o'clock on the morning of the great day.

Miss Blithers was not at the ball. She was in New York City serenely enjoying one of the big summer shows, accompanied by young Scoville and her one-time governess, a middle-aged gentlewoman who had seen even better days than those spent in the employ of William W. Blithers. The resolute young lady had done precisely what she said she would do, and for the first time in his life Mr. Blithers realised that his daughter was a creation and not a mere condition. He wilted like a famished water-lily and went about the place in a state of bewilderment so bleak that even his wife felt sorry for him and refrained from the "I told you so" that might have been expected under the circumstances.

Maud's telegram, which came at three o'clock in the afternoon, was meant to be reassuring but it failed of its purpose. It said: "Have a good time and don't lose any sleep over me. I shall sleep very soundly myself at the Ritz to-night and hope you will be doing the same when I return home to-morrow afternoon, for I know you will be dreadfully tired after all the

excitement. Convey my congratulations to the guest of honor and believe me to be your devoted and obedient daughter."

The co-incidental absence of young Mr. Scoville from the ball was a cause of considerable uneasiness on the part of the agitated Mr. Blithers, who commented upon it quite expansively in the seclusion of his own bed-chamber after the last guest had sought repose. Some of the things that Mr. Blithers said about Mr. Scoville will never be forgotten by the four walls of that room, if, as commonly reported, they possess auricular attachments.

Any one who imagines that Mr. Blithers accepted Maud's defection as a final disposition of the cause he had set his heart upon is very much mistaken in his man. Far from receding so much as an inch from his position, he at once set about to strengthen it in such a way that Maud would have to come to the conclusion that it was useless to combat the inevitable, and ultimately would heap praises upon his devoted head for the great blessing he was determined to bestow upon her in spite of herself.

The last of the special coaches was barely moving on its jiggly way to the main line, carrying the tag end of the revellers, when he set forth in his car for a mid-day visit to Red Roof. Already the huge camp of Slavs and Italians was beginning to jerk up the borrowed rails and ties; the work trains were rumbling and snorting in the meadows above Blitherwood, tottering about on the uncertain road-bed. He gave a

few concise and imperative orders to obsequious superintendents and foremen, who subsequently repeated them with even greater freedom to the perspiring foreigners, and left the scene of confusion without so much as a glance behind. Wagons, carts, motor-trucks and all manner of wheeled things were scuttling about Blitherwood as he shot down the long, winding avenue toward the lodge gates, but he paid no attention to them. They were removing the remnants of a glory that had passed at five in the morning. He was not interested in the well-plucked skeleton. It was a nuisance getting rid of it, that was all, and he wanted it to be completely out of sight when he returned from Red Roof. If a vestige of the ruins remained, some one would hear from him! That was understood. And when Maud came home on the five-fourteen she would not find him asleep — not by a long shot!

Half-way to Red Roof, he espied a man walking briskly along the road ahead of him. To be perfectly accurate, he was walking in the middle of the road and his back was toward the swift-moving, almost noiseless Packard.

"Blow the horn for the dam' fool," said Mr. Blithers to the chauffeur. A moment later the pedestrian leaped nimbly aside and the car shot past, the dying wail of the siren dwindling away in the whirr of the wheels. "Look where you're going!" shouted Mr. Blithers from the tonneau, as if the walker had come near to running him down instead of the other way

around. "Whoa! Stop 'er, Jackson!" he called to the driver. He had recognised the pedestrian.

The car came to a stop with grinding brakes, and at the same time the pedestrian halted a hundred yards away.

"Back up," commanded Mr. Blithers in some haste for the Prince seemed to be on the point of deserting the highway for the wood that lined it. "Morning, Prince!" he shouted, waving his hat vigorously. "Want a lift?"

The car shot backward with almost the same speed that it had gone forward, and the Prince exercised prudence when he stepped quickly up the sloping bank at the roadside.

"Were you addressing me," he demanded curtly, as the car came to a stop.

"Yes, your highness. Get in. I'm going your way," said Mr. Blithers beamingly.

"I mean a moment ago, when you shouted 'Look where you are going,'" said Robin, an angry gleam in his eye.

Mr. Blithers looked positively dumbfounded. "Good Heavens, no!" he cried. "I was speaking to the chauffeur." (Jackson's back seemed to stiffen a little.) "I've told him a thousand times to be careful about running up on people like that. Now this is the last time I'll warn you, Jackson. The next time you go. Understand? Just because you happen to be driving for me doesn't signify that you can run over people who —"

"It's all right, Mr. Blithers," interrupted Robin, with his fine smile. "No harm done. I'll walk if you don't mind. Out for a bit of exercise, you know. Thank you just the same."

"Where are you bound for?" asked Mr. Blithers.

"I don't know. I ramble where my fancy leads me."

"I guess I'll get out and stroll along with you. God knows I need more exercise than I get. Is it agreeable?" He was on the ground by this time. Without waiting for an answer, he directed Jackson to run on to Red Roof and wait for him.

"I shall be charmed," said Robin, a twinkle in the tail of his eye. "An eight or ten mile jaunt will do you a world of good, I'm sure. Shall we explore this little road up the mountain and then drop down to Red Roof? I don't believe it can be more than five or six miles."

"Capital," said Mr. Blithers with enthusiasm. He happened to know that it was a "short cut" to Red Roof and less than a mile as the crow flies. True, there was something of an ascent ahead of them, but there was also a corresponding descent at the other end. Besides, he was confident he could keep up with the long-legged youngster by the paradoxical process of holding back. The Prince, having suggested the route, couldn't very well be arbitrary in traversing it. Mr. Blithers regarded the suggestion as an invitation.

They struck off into the narrow woodland road, not precisely side by side, but somewhat after the fashion

of a horseback rider and his groom, or, more strictly speaking, as a Knight and his vassal. Robin started off so briskly that Mr. Blithers fell behind a few paces and had to exert himself considerably to keep from losing more ground as they took the first steep rise. The road was full of ruts and cross ruts and littered with boulders that had ambled down the mountain-side in the spring moving. To save his life, Mr. Blithers couldn't keep to a straight course. He went from rut to rut and from rock to rock with the fidelity of a magnetised atom, seldom putting his foot where he meant to put it, and never by any chance achieving a steady stride. He would take one long, purposeful step and then a couple of short "feelers," progressing very much as a man tramps over a newly ploughed field.

At the top of the rise, Robin considerately slackened his pace and the chubby gentleman drew alongside, somewhat out of breath but as cheerful as a cricket.

"Going too fast for you, Mr. Blithers?" inquired Robin.

"Not at all," said Mr. Blithers. "By the way, Prince," he went on, cunningly seizing the young man's arm and thereby putting a check on his speed for the time being at least, "I want to explain my daughter's unfortunate absence last night. You must have thought it very strange. Naturally it was unavoidable. The poor girl is really quite heart-broken. I beg pardon!" He stepped into a rut and came

perilously near to going over on his nose. "Beastly road! Thanks. Good thing I took hold of you. Yes, as I was saying, it was really a most unfortunate thing; missed the train, don't you see. Went down for the day — just like a girl, you know — and missed the train."

"Ah, I see. She missed it twice."

"Eh? Oh! Ha ha! Very good! She might just as well have missed it a dozen times as once, eh? Well, she could have arranged for a special to bring her up, but she's got a confounded streak of thriftiness in her. Couldn't think of spending the money. Silly idea of — I beg your pardon, did I hurt you? I'm pretty heavy, you know, no light weight when I come down on a fellow's toe like that. What say to sitting down on this log for a while? Give your foot a chance to rest a bit. Deucedly awkward of me. Ought to look out where I'm stepping, eh?"

"It really doesn't matter, Mr. Blithers," said Robin hastily. "We'll keep right on if it's all the same to you. I'm due at home in — in half an hour. We lunch very punctually."

"I was particularly anxious for you and Maud to meet under the conditions that obtained last night," went on Mr. Blithers, with a regretful look at the log they were passing. "Nothing could have been more — er — ripping."

"I hear from every one that your daughter is most attractive," said Robin. "Sorry not to have met her, Mr. Blithers."

"Oh, you'll meet her all right, Prince. She's coming home to-day. I believe Mrs. Blithers is expecting you to dinner to-night. She —"

"I'm sure there must be some mistake," began Robin, but was cut short.

"I was on my way to Red Roof to ask you and Count Quiddux to give us this evening in connection with that little affair we are arranging. It is most imperative that it should be to-night, as my attorney is coming up for the conference."

"I fear that Mrs. King has planned something —"

Mr. Blithers waved his hand deprecatingly. "I am sure Mrs. King will let you off when she knows how important it is. As a matter of fact, it has to be to-night or not at all."

There was a note in his voice that Robin did not like. It savoured of arrogance.

"I daresay Count Quinnox can attend to all the details, Mr. Blithers. I have the power of veto, of course, but I shall be guided by the counsel of my ministers. You need have no hesitancy in dealing with —"

"That's not the point, Prince. I am a business man,— as perhaps you know. I make it a point never to deal with any one except the head of a concern, if you'll pardon my way of putting it. It isn't right to speak of Growstock as a concern, but you'll understand, of course. Figure of speech."

"I can only assure you, sir, that Graustark is in a position to indemnify you against any possible chance

of loss. You will be amply secured. I take it that you are not coming to our assistance through any desire to be philanthropic, but as a business proposition, pure and simple. At least, that is how we regard the matter. Am I not right?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Blithers. "I haven't got sixteen millions to throw away. Still I don't see that that has anything to do with my request that you be present at the conference to-night. To be perfectly frank with you, I don't like working in the dark. You have the power of veto, as you say. Well, if I am to lend Groostork a good many millions of hard-earned dollars, I certainly don't relish the idea that you may take it into your head to upset the whole transaction merely because you have not had the matter presented to you by me instead of by your cabinet, competent as its members may be. First hand information on any subject is my notion of simplicity."

"The integrity of the cabinet is not to be questioned, Mr. Blithers. Its members have never failed Graustark in any —"

"I beg your pardon, Prince," said Mr. Blithers firmly, "but I certainly suspect that they failed her when they contracted this debt to Russia. You will forgive me for saying it, but it was the most asinine bit of short-sightedness I've ever heard of. My office boys could have seen farther than your honourable ministers."

To his utter amazement, Robin turned a pair of beaming, excited eyes upon him.

"Do you really mean that, Mr. Blithers?" he cried eagerly.

"I certainly do!"

"By jove, I — I can't tell you how happy I am to hear you say it. You see it is exactly what John Tullis said from the first. He was bitterly opposed to the loan. He tried his best to convince the prime minister that it was inadvisable. I granted him the special privilege of addressing the full House of Nobles on the question, an honour that no alien had known up to that time. Of course I was a boy when all this happened, Mr. Blithers, or I might have put a stop to the — but I'll not go into that. The House of Nobles went against his judgment and voted in favour of accepting Russia's loan. Now they realise that dear old John Tullis was right. Somehow it gratifies me to hear you say that they were — ahem! — short-sighted."

"What you need in Groostock is a little more good American blood," announced Mr. Blithers, pointedly. "If you are going to cope with the world, you've got to tackle the job with brains and not with that idiotic thing called faith. There's no such thing in these days as charity among men, good will, and all that nonsense. Now, you've got a splendid start in the right direction, Prince. You've got American blood in your veins and that means a good deal. Take my advice and increase the proportion. In a couple of generations you'll have something to brag about. Take Tullis as your example. Beget sons that will

think and act as he is capable of doing. Weed out the thin blood and give the crown of Grasstick something that is thick and red. It will be the making of your —"

"I suppose you are advising me to marry an American woman, Mr. Blithers," said Robin drily.

Mr. Blithers directed a calculating squint into the tree-tops. "I am simply looking ahead for my own protection, Prince," said he.

"In what respect?"

"Well I am putting a lot of money into the hands of your people. Isn't it natural that I should look ahead to some extent?"

"But my people are honest. They will pay."

"I understand all that, but at the same time I do not relish the idea of some day being obliged to squeeze blood from a turnip. Now is the time for you to think for the future. Your people are honest, I'll grant. But they also are poor. And why? Because no one has been able to act for them as your friend Tullis is capable of acting. The day will come when they will have to settle with me, and will it be any easier to pay William W. Blithers than it is to pay Russia? Not a bit of it. As you have said, I am not a philanthropist. I shall exact full and prompt payment. I prefer to collect from the prosperous, however, and not from the poor. It goes against the grain. That's why I want to see you rich and powerful — as well as honest."

"I grant you it is splendid philosophy," said Robin.

"But are you not forgetting that even the best of Americans are sometimes failures when it comes to laying up treasure?"

"As individuals, yes; but not as a class. You will not deny that we are the richest people in the world. On the other hand I do not pretend to say that we are a people of one strain of blood. We represent a mixture of many strains, but underneath them all runs the full stream that makes us what we are: Americans. You can't get away from that. Yes, I *do* advise you to marry an American girl."

"In other words, I am to make a business of it," said Robin, tolerantly.

"It isn't beyond the range of possibility that you should fall in love with an American girl, is it? You wouldn't call that making a business of it, would you?"

"You may rest assured, Mr. Blithers, that I shall marry to please myself and no one else," said Robin, regarding him with a coldness that for an instant affected the millionaire uncomfortably.

"Well," said Mr. Blithers, after a moment of hard thinking, "it may interest you to know that I married for love."

"It *does* interest me," said Robin. "I am glad that you did."

"I was a comparatively poor man when I married. The girl I married was well-off in her own right. She had brains as well. We worked together to lay the foundation for a — well, for the fortune we now pos-

sess. A fortune, I may add, that is to go, every dollar of it, to my daughter. It represents nearly five hundred million dollars. The greatest king in the world to-day is poor in comparison to that vast estate. My daughter will one day be the richest woman in the world."

"Why are you taking the pains to enlighten me as to your daughter's future, Mr. Blithers?"

"Because I regard you as a sensible young man, Prince."

"Thank you. And I suppose you regard your daughter as a sensible young woman?"

"Certainly!" exploded Mr. Blithers.

"Well, it seems to me, she will be capable of taking care of her fortune a great deal more successfully than you imagine, Mr. Blithers. She will doubtless marry an excellent chap who has the capacity to increase her fortune, rather than to let it stand at a figure that some day may be surpassed by the possessions of an ambitious king."

There was fine irony in the Prince's tone but no trace of offensiveness. Nevertheless, Mr. Blithers turned a shade more purple than before, and not from the violence of exercise. He was having some difficulty in controlling his temper. What manner of fool was this fellow who could sneer at five hundred million dollars? He managed to choke back something that rose to his lips and very politely remarked:

"I am sure you will like her, Prince. If I do say it myself, she is as handsome as they grow."

"So I have been told."

"You will see her to-night."

"Really, Mr. Blithers, I cannot —"

"I'll fix it with Mrs. King. Don't you worry."

"May I be pardoned for observing that Mrs. King, greatly as I love her, is not invested with the power to govern my actions?" said Robin haughtily.

"And may I be pardoned for suggesting that it is your duty to your people to completely understand this loan of mine before you agree to accept it?" said Mr. Blithers, compressing his lips.

"Forgive me, Mr. Blithers, but it is not altogether improbable that Graustark may secure the money elsewhere."

"It is not only improbable but impossible," said Mr. Blithers flatly.

"Impossible?"

"Absolutely," said the millionaire so significantly that Robin would have been a dolt not to grasp the situation. Nothing could have been clearer than the fact that Mr. Blithers believed it to be in his power to block any effort Graustark might make in other directions to secure the much-needed money.

"Will you come to the point, Mr. Blithers?" said the young Prince, stopping abruptly in the middle of the road and facing his companion. "What are you trying to get at?"

Mr. Blithers was not long in getting to the point. In the first place, he was hot and tired and his shoes were hurting; in the second place, he felt that he knew

precisely how to handle these money-seeking scions of nobility. He planted himself squarely in front of the Prince and jammed his hands deep into his coat pockets.

"The day my daughter is married to the man of my choice, I will hand over to that man exactly twenty million dollars," he said slowly, impressively.

"Yes, go on."

"The sole object I have in life is to see my girl happy and at the same time at the top of the heap. She is worthy of any man's love. She is as good as gold. She—"

"The point is this, then: You would like to have me for a son-in-law."

"Yes," said Mr. Blithers.

Robin grinned. He was amused in spite of himself. "You take it for granted that I can be bought?"

"I have not made any such statement."

"And how much will you hand over to the man of *her* choice when she marries him?" enquired the young man.

"You will be her choice," said the other, without the quiver of an eye-lash.

"How can you be sure of that? Has she no mind of her own?"

"It isn't incomprehensible that she should fall in love with you, is it?"

"It might be possible, of course, provided she is not already in love with some one else."

Mr. Blithers started. "Have you heard any one

say that — but, that's nonsense! She's not in love with any one, take it from me. And just to show you how fair I am to her — and to you — I'll stake my head you fall in love with each other before you've been together a week."

"But we're not going to be together for a week."

"I should have said before you've known each other a week. You will find —"

"Just a moment, please. We can cut all this very short, and go about our business. I've never seen your daughter, nor, to my knowledge, has she ever laid eyes on me. From what I've heard of her, she *has* a mind of her own. You will not be able to force her into a marriage that doesn't appeal to her, and you may be quite sure, Mr. Blithers, that you can't force me into one. I do not want you to feel that I have a single disparaging thought concerning Miss Blithers. It is possible that I could fall in love with her inside of a week, or even sooner. But I don't intend to, Mr. Blithers, any more than she intends to fall in love with me. You say that twenty millions will go to the man she marries, if he is your choice. Well, I don't give a hang, sir, if you make it fifty millions. The chap who gets it will not be me, so what's the odds? You —"

"Wait a minute, young man," said Mr. Blithers coolly. (He was never anything but cool when under fire.) "Why not wait until you have met my daughter before making a statement like that? After all, am I not the one who is taking chances? Well, I'm

willing to risk my girl's happiness with you and that's saying everything when you come right down to it. She will make you happy in —"

"I am not for sale, Mr. Blithers," said Robin abruptly. "Good morning." He turned into the wood and was sauntering away with his chin high in the air when Mr. Blithers called out to him from behind.

"I shall expect you to-night, just the same."

Robin halted, amazed by the man's assurance. He retraced his steps to the roadside.

"Will you pardon a slight feeling of curiosity on my part, Mr. Blithers, if I ask whether your daughter consents to the arrangement you propose. Does she approve of the scheme?"

Mr. Blithers was honest. "No, she doesn't," he said succinctly. "At least, not at present. I'll be honest with you. She stayed away from the ball last night simply because she did not want to meet you. That's the kind of a girl *she* is."

"By jove, I take off my hat to her," cried Robin. "She is a brick, after all. Take it from me, Mr. Blithers, you will not be able to hand over twenty millions without her consent. I believe that I should enjoy meeting her, now that I come to think of it. It would be a pleasure to exchange confidences with a girl of that sort."

Mr. Blithers betrayed agitation. "See here, Prince, I don't want her to know that I've said anything to you about this matter," he said, unconsciously lowering his voice as if fearing that Maud might be

somewhere within hearing distance. "This is between you and me. Don't breathe a word of it to her. 'Gad, she'd — she'd skin me alive!" At the very thought of it, he wiped his forehead with unusual vigour.

Robin laughed heartily. "Rest easy, Mr. Blithers. I shall not even think of your proposition again, much less speak of it."

"Come now, Prince; wait until you've seen her. I know you'll get on famously —"

"I should like her to know that I consider her a brick, Mr. Blithers. Is it too much to ask of you? Just tell her that I think she's a brick."

"Tell her yourself," growled Mr. Blithers, looking very black. "You will see her this evening," he added levelly.

"Shall I instruct your chauffeur to come for you up here or will you walk back to —"

"I'll walk to Red Roof," said Mr. Blithers doggedly. "I'm going to ask Mrs. King to let you off for to-night."

CHAPTER VII

A LETTER FROM MAUD

Mr. Blithers, triumphant, left Red Roof shortly after luncheon; Mr. Blithers, dismayed, arrived at Blitherwood a quarter of an hour later. He had had his way with Robin, who, after all, was coming to dinner that evening with Count Quinnox. The Prince, after a few words in private with the Count, changed his mind and accepted Mr. Blithers' invitation with a liveliness that was mistaken for eagerness by that gentleman, who had made very short work of subduing Mrs. King when she tried to tell him that her own dinner-party would be ruined if the principal guest defaulted. He was gloating over his victory up to the instant he reached his own lodge gates. There dismay sat patiently waiting for him in the shape of a messenger from the local telegraph office in the village below. He had seen Mr. Blithers approaching in the distance, and, with an astuteness that argued well for his future success in life, calmly sat down to wait instead of pedaling his decrepit bicycle up the long slope to the villa.

He delivered a telegram and kindly vouchsafed the information that it was from New York.

Mr. Blithers experienced a queer sinking of the heart as he gazed at the envelope. Something warned

him that if he opened it in the presence of the messenger he would say something that a young boy ought not to hear.

"It's from Maud," said the obliging boy, beaming good-nature. It cost him a quarter, that bit of gentility, for Mr. Blithers at once said something that a messenger boy ought to hear, and ordered Jackson to go ahead.

It was from Maud and it said: "I shall stay in town a few days longer. It is delightfully cool here. Dear old Miranda is at the Ritz with me and we are having a fine spree. Don't worry about money. I find I have a staggering balance in the bank. The cashier showed me where I had made a mistake in subtraction of an even ten thousand. I was amazed to find what a big difference a little figure makes. Have made no definite plans but will write Mother to-night. Please give my love to the Prince. Have you seen to-day's *Town Truth?* Or worse, has he seen it? Your loving daughter, Maud."

The butler was sure it was apoplexy, but the chauffeur, out of a wide experience, announced, behind his hand, that he would be all right the instant the words ceased to stick in his throat. And he was right. Mr. Blithers *was* all right. Not even the chauffeur had seen him when he was more so.

A little later on, after he had cooled off to a quite considerable extent, Mr. Blithers lighted a cigar and sat down in the hall outside his wife's bed-chamber door. She was having her beauty nap. Not even he

possessed the temerity to break in upon that. He sat and listened for the first sound that would indicate the appeasement of beauty, occasionally hitching his chair a trifle nearer to the door in the agony of impatience. By the time Jackson returned from the village with word that a copy of *Town Truth* was not to be had until the next day, he was so close to the door that if any one had happened to stick a hat pin through the keyhole at precisely the right instant it would have punctured his left ear with appalling results.

"What are we going to do about it?" he demanded three minutes after entering the chamber. His wife was prostrate on the luxurious couch from which she had failed to arise when he burst in upon her with the telegram in his hand.

"Oh, the foolish child," she moaned. "If she only knew how adorable he is she wouldn't be acting in this perfectly absurd manner. Every girl who was here last night is madly in love with him. Why must Maud be so obstinate?"

Mr. Blithers was very careful not to mention his roadside experience with the Prince, and you may be sure that he said nothing about his proposition to the young man. He merely declared, with a vast bitterness in his soul, that the Prince was coming to dinner, but what the deuce was the use?

"She ought to be soundly — spoken to," said he, breaking the sentence with a hasty gulp. "Now, Lou, there's just one thing to do. I must go to New York on the midnight train and get her. That woman was

all right as a tutor, but hanged if I like to see a daughter of mine traipsing around New York with a school teacher. She —"

"You forget that she has retired on a competence. She is not in active employment, Will. You forget that she is one of the Van Valkens."

"There you go, talking about good old families again. Why is it that so blamed many of your fine old blue stockings are hunting jobs —"

"Now don't be vulgar, Will," she cut in. "Maud is quite safe with Miranda, and you know it perfectly well, so don't talk like that. I think it would be a fearful mistake for you to go to New York. She would never forgive you and, what is more to the point, she wouldn't budge a step if you tried to bully her into coming home with you. You know it quite as well as I do."

He groaned. "Give me a chance to think, Lou. Just half a chance, that's all I ask. I'll work out some —"

"Wait until her letter comes. We'll see what she has to say. Perhaps she intends coming home tomorrow, who can tell? This may be a pose on her part. Give her free rein and she will not pull against the bit. It may surprise her into doing the sensible thing if we calmly ignore her altogether. I've been thinking it over, and I've come to the conclusion that we'll be doing the wisest thing in the world if we pay absolutely no attention to her."

"By George, I believe you've hit it, Lou! She'll

be looking for a letter or telegram from me and she'll not receive a word, eh? She'll be expecting us to beg her to come back and all the while we just sit tight and say not a word. We'll fool her, by thunder. By to-morrow afternoon she'll be so curious to know what's got into us that she'll come home on a run. You're right. It takes a thief to catch a thief,— which is another way of saying that it takes a woman to understand a woman. We'll sit tight and let Maud worry for a day or two. It will do her good."

Maud's continued absence was explained to Prince Robin that evening, not by the volcanic Mr. Blithers but by his practised and adroit better-half who had no compunction in ascribing it to the alarming condition of a very dear friend in New York,— one of the Van Valkens, you know.

"Maud is so tender-hearted, so loyal, so really sweet about her friends, that nothing in the world could have induced her to leave this dear friend, don't you know."

"I am extremely sorry not to have met your daughter," said Robin very politely.

"Oh, but she will be here in a day or two, Prince."

"Unfortunately, we are leaving to-morrow, Mrs. Blithers."

"To-morrow?" murmured Mrs. Blithers, aghast.

"I received a cablegram to-day advising me to return to Edelweiss at once. We are obliged to cut short a very charming visit with Mr. and Mrs. King and to give up the trip to Washington. Lieutenant

Dank left for New York this afternoon to exchange our reservations for the first ship that we can —"

"What's this?" demanded Mr. Blithers, abruptly withdrawing his attention from Count Quinnox who was in the middle of a sentence when the interruption came. They were on the point of going out to dinner. "What's this?"

"The Prince says that he is leaving to-morrow —"

"Nonsense!" exploded Mr. Blithers, with no effort toward geniality. "He doesn't mean it. Why,— why, we haven't signed a single agreement —"

"Fortunately it isn't necessary for me to sign anything, Mr. Blithers," broke in Robin hastily. "The papers are to be signed by the Minister of Finance, and afterwards my signature is attached in approval. Isn't that true, Count Quinnox?"

"I daresay Mr. Blithers understands the situation perfectly," said the Count.

Mr. Blithers looked blank. He *did* understand the situation, that was the worst of it. He knew that although the cabinet had sanctioned the loan by cable, completing the transaction so far as it could be completed at this time, it was still necessary for the Minister of Finance to sign the agreement under the royal seal of Graustark.

"Of course I understand it," he said bluntly. "Still I had it in mind to ask the Prince to put his signature to a sort of preliminary document which would at least assure me that he would sign the final

agreement when the time comes. That's only fair, isn't it?"

"Quite fair, Mr. Blithers. The Prince will sign such an article to-morrow or the next day at your office in the city. Pray have no uneasiness, sir. It shall be as you wish. By the way, I understood that your solicitor — your lawyer, I should say,— was to be here this evening. It had occurred to me that he might draw up the statement,— if Mr. Blithers will forgive us in our haste —"

"He couldn't get here," said Mr. Blithers, and no more. He was thinking too intently of something more important. "What's turned up?"

"Turned up, Mr. Blithers?"

"Yes — in Groostock. What's taking you off in such a hurry?"

"The Prince has been away for nearly six months," said the Count, as if that explained everything.

"Was it necessary to cable for him to come home?" persisted the financier.

"Graustark and Dawsbergen are endeavouring to form an alliance, Mr. Blithers, and Prince Robin's presence at the capitol is very much to be desired in connection with the project."

"What kind of an alliance?"

The Count looked bored. "An alliance prescribed for the general improvement of the two races, I should say, Mr. Blithers." He smiled. "It would in no way impair the credit of Graustark, however. It is what

you might really describe as a family secret, if you will pardon my flippancy."

The butler announced dinner.

"Wait for a couple of days, Prince, and I'll send you down to New York by special train," said Mr. Blithers.

"Thank you. It is splendid of you. I daresay everything will depend on Dank's success in —"

"Crawford," said Mr. Blithers to the butler, "ask Mr. Davis to look up the sailings for next week and let me know at once, will you?" Turning to the Prince, he went on: "We can wire down to-night and engage passage for next week. Davis is my secretary. I'll have him attend to everything. And now let's forget our troubles."

A great deal was said by her parents about Maud's unfortunate detention in the city. Both of them were decidedly upset by the sudden change in the Prince's plans. Once under pretext of whispering to Crawford about the wine, Mr. Blithers succeeded in transmitting a question to his wife. She shook her head in reply, and he sighed audibly. He had asked if she thought he'd better take the midnight train.

Mr. Davis found that there were a dozen ships sailing the next week, but nothing came of it, for the Prince resolutely declared he would be obliged to take the first available steamer.

"We shall go down to-morrow," he said, and even Mr. Blithers subsided. He looked to his wife in des-

peration. She failed him for the first time in her life. Her eyes were absolutely messageless.

"I'll go down with you," he said, and then gave his wife a look of defiance.

The next morning brought Maud's letter to her mother. It said: "Dearest Mother: I enclose the cutting from *Town Truth*. You may see for yourself what a sickening thing it is. The whole world knows by this time that the ball was a joke — a horrible joke. Everybody knows that you are trying to hand me over to Prince Robin neatly wrapped up in bank notes. And everybody knows that he is laughing at us, and he isn't alone in his mirth either. What must the Truxton Kings think of us? I can't bear the thought of meeting that pretty, clever woman face to face. I know I should die of mortification, for, of course, she must believe that I am dying to marry anything on earth that has a title and a pair of legs. Somehow I don't blame you and dad. You really love me, I know, and you want to give me the best that the world affords. But why, oh why, can't you let me choose for myself? I don't object to having a title, but I do object to having a husband that I don't want and who certainly could not, by any chance, want me. You think that I am in love with Channie Scoville. Well, I'm not. I am very fond of him, that's all, and if it came to a pinch I would marry him in preference to any prince on the globe. To-day I met a couple of girls who were at the ball. They told me that the Prince is

adorable. They are really quite mad about him, and one of them had the nerve to ask what it was going to cost dad to land him. *Town Truth* says he is to cost ten millions! Well, you may just tell dad that I'll help him to practice economy. He needn't pay a nickle for my husband — when I get him. The world is small. It may be that I shall come upon this same Prince Charming some place before it is too late, and fall in love with him all of a heap. Loads of silly girls do fall in love with fairy princes, and I'm just as silly as the rest of them. Ever since I was a little kiddie I've dreamed of marrying a real, lace-and-gold Prince, the kind Miranda used to read about in the story books. But I also dreamed that he loved me. There's the rub, you see. How could any prince love a girl who set out to buy him with a lot of silly millions? It's not to be expected. I know it is done in the best society, but I should want my prince to be happy instead of merely comfortable. I should want both of us to live happy ever afterwards.

"So, dearest mother, I am going abroad to forget. Miranda is going with me and we sail next Saturday on the *Jupiter* I think. We haven't got our suite, but Mr. Bliss says he is sure he can arrange it for me. If we can't get one on the *Jupiter*, we'll take some other boat that is just as inconspicuous. You see, I want to go on a ship that isn't likely to be packed with people I know, for it is my intention to travel incog, as they say in the books. No one shall stare at me and say: 'There is that Maud Blithers we were

reading about in *Town Truth* — and all the other papers this week. Her father is going to buy a prince for her.'

"I know dad will be perfectly furious, but I'm going or die, one or the other. Now it won't do a bit of good to try to stop me, dearest. The best thing for you and dad to do is to come down at once and say good-bye to me — but you are not to go to the steamer! Never! Please, please come, for I love you both and I do so want you to love me. Come to-morrow and kiss your horrid, horrid, disappointing, loathsome daughter — and forgive her, too."

Mr. Blithers was equal to the occasion. His varying emotions manifested themselves with peculiar vividness during the reading of the letter by his tearful wife. At the outset he was frankly humble and contrite; he felt bitterly aggrieved over the unhappy position in which they innocently had placed their cherished idol. Then came the deep breath of relief over the apparent casting away of young Scoville, followed by an angry snort when Maud repeated the remark of her girl friend. His dismay was pathetic while Mrs. Blithers was fairly gasping out Maud's determination to go abroad, but before she reached the concluding sentences of the extraordinary missive, he was himself again. As a matter of fact, he was almost jubilant. He slapped his knee with resounding force and uttered an ejaculation that caused his wife to stare at him as if the very worst had happened: he was a chuckling lunatic!

"Immense!" he exclaimed. "Immense!"

"Oh, Will!" she sobbed.

"Nothing could be better! Luck is with me, Lou. It always is."

"In heaven's name, what are you saying, Will?"

"Great Scott, can't you see? He goes abroad, she goes abroad. See? Same ship. See what I mean? Nothing could be finer. They —"

"But I do not want my child to go abroad," wailed the unhappy mother. "I cannot bear —"

"Stuff and nonsense! Brace up! Grasp the romance. Both of 'em sailing under assumed names. They see each other on deck. Mutual attraction. Love at first sight. Both of 'em. Money no object. There you are. Leave it to me."

"Maud is not the kind of girl to take up with a stranger on board —"

"Don't glare at me like that! Love finds the way, it doesn't matter what kind of a girl she is. But listen to me, Lou; we've got to be mighty careful that Maud doesn't suspect that we're putting up a job on her. She'd balk at the gang-plank and that would be the end of it. She must not know that he is on board. Now, here's the idea," and he talked on in a strangely subdued voice for fifteen minutes, his enthusiasm mounting to such heights that she was fairly lifted to the seventh heaven he produced, and, for once in her life, she actually submitted to his bumptious argument without so much as a single protesting word.

The down train at two-seventeen had on board a

most distinguished group of passengers, according to the Pullman conductor whose skilful conniving resulted in the banishment of a few unimportant creatures who had paid for chairs in the observation coach but who had to get out, whether or no, when Mr. Blithers loudly said it was a nuisance having everything on the shady side of the car taken "on a hot day like this." He surreptitiously informed the conductor that there was a prince in his party, and that highly impressed official at once informed ten other passengers that they had no business in a private car and would have to move up to the car ahead — and rather quickly at that.

The Prince announced that Lieutenant Dank had secured comfortable cabins on a steamer sailing Saturday, but he did not feel at liberty to mention the name of the boat owing to his determination to avoid newspaper men, who no doubt would move heaven and earth for an interview, now that he had become a person of so much importance in the social world. Indeed, his indentity was to be more completely obscured than at any time since he landed on American soil. He thanked Mr. Blithers for his offer to command the "royal suite" on the *Jupiter*, but declined, volunteering the somewhat curt remark that it was his earnest desire to keep as far away from royalty as possible on the voyage over. (A remark that Mr. Blithers couldn't quite fathom, then or afterward.)

Mrs. Blithers' retort to her husband's shocked comment on the un-princely appearance of the young man

and the wofully ordinary suit of clothes worn by the Count, was sufficiently caustic, and he was silenced — and convinced. Neither of the distinguished foreigners looked the part of a nobleman.

"I wouldn't talk about clothes if I were you," Mrs. Blithers had said on the station platform. "Who would suspect you of being one of the richest men in America?" She sent a disdainful glance at his baggy knees and bulging coat pockets, and for the moment he shrank into the state of being one of the poorest men in America.

They were surprised and not a little perplexed by the fact that the Prince and his companion arrived at the station quite alone. Neither of the Kings accompanied them. There was, Mrs. Blithers admitted, food for thought in this peculiar omission on the part of the Prince's late host and hostess, and she would have given a great deal to know what was back of it. The "luggage" was attended to by the admirable Hobbs, there being no sign of a Red Roof servant about the place. Moreover, there seemed to be considerable uneasiness noticeable in the manner of the two foreigners. They appeared to be unnecessarily impatient for the train to arrive, looking at their watches now and again, and frequently sending sharp glances down the village street in the direction of Red Roof. Blithers afterwards remarked that they made him think of a couple of absconding cashiers. The mystery, however, was never explained.

Arriving at the Grand Central Terminal, Prince

Robin and the Count made off in a taxi-cab, smilingly declining to reveal their hotel destination.

"But where am I to send my attorney with the agreement you are to sign, Prince?" asked Mr. Blithers, plainly irritated by the young man's obstinacy in declining to be "dropped" at his hotel by the Blithers motor.

"I shall come to your office at eleven to-morrow morning, Mr. Blithers," said Robin, his hat in his hand. He had bowed very deeply to Mrs. Blithers.

"But that's not right," blustered the financier. "A prince of royal blood hadn't ought to visit a money-grubber's office. It's not —"

"*Noblesse oblige*," said Robin, with his hand on his heart. "It has been a pleasure to know you, Mrs. Blithers. I trust we may meet again. If you should ever come to Graustark, please consider that the castle is yours — as you hospitable Americans would say."

"We surely will," said Mrs. Blithers. Both the Prince and Count Quinnox bowed very profoundly, and did not smile.

"And it will be ours," added Mr. Blithers, more to himself than to his wife as the two tall figures moved off with the throng. Then to his wife: "Now to find out what ship they're sailing on. I'll fix it so they'll *have* to take the *Jupiter*, whether they want to or not."

"Wouldn't it be wisdom to find out what ship Maud is sailing on, Will? It seems to me that she is the real problem."

"Right you are!" said he instantly. "I must be getting dotty in my old age, Lou."

They were nearing the Ritz when she broke a prolonged period of abstraction by suddenly inquiring: "What did you mean when you said to him on the train: 'Better think it over, Prince,' and what did he mean by the insolent grin he gave you in reply?"

Mr. Blithers looked straight ahead.

"Business," said he, answering the first question but not the last.

CHAPTER VIII

ON BOARD THE "JUPITER"

A GREY day at sea. The *Jupiter* seemed to be slinking through the mist and drizzle, so still was the world of waters. The ocean was as smooth as a mill pond; the reflected sky came down bleak and drab and no wind was stirring. The rush of the ship through the glassy, sullen sea produced a fictitious gale across the decks; aside from that there was dead calm ahead and behind.

A threat seemed to lurk in the smooth, oily face of the Atlantic. Far ahead stretched the grey barricade that seemed to mark the spot where the voyage was to end. There was no going beyond that clear-cut line. When the ship came up to it, there would be no more water beyond; naught but a vast space into which the vessel must topple and go on falling to the end of time. The great sirens were silent, for the fog of the night before had lifted, laying bare a desolate plain. The ship was sliding into oblivion, magnificently indifferent to the catastrophe that awaited its arrival at the edge of the universe. And she was sailing the sea alone. All other ships had passed over that sinister line and were plunging toward a bottom that would never be reached, so long is eternity.

The decks of the *Jupiter* were wet with the almost invisible drizzle that filled the air, yet they were

swarming with the busy pedestrians who never lose an opportunity to let every one know that they are on board. No ship's company is complete without its leg-stretchers. They who never walk a block on dry land without complaining, right manfully lop off miles when walking on the water, and get to be known — at least visually — to the entire first cabin before they have paraded half way across the Atlantic. (There was once a man who had the strutting disease so badly that he literally walked from Sandy Hook to Gaunt's Rock, but, who, on getting to London, refused to walk from the Savoy to the Cecil because of a weak heart.) The worst feature about these inveterate water-walkers is that they tread quite as proudly upon other people's feet as they do upon their own, and as often as not they appear to do it from choice. Still, that is another story. It has nothing to do with the one we are trying to tell.

To resume, the decks of the *Jupiter* were wet and the sky was drab. New York was twenty-four hours astern and the brief Sunday service had come to a peaceful end. It died just in time to escape the horrors of a popular programme by the band amidships. The echo of the last amen was a resounding thump on the big bass drum.

Three tall, interesting looking men stood leaning against the starboard rail of the promenade deck, unmindful of the mist, watching the scurrying throng of exercise fiends. Two were young, the third was old, and of the three there was one who merited the second

glance that invariably was bestowed upon him by the circling passers-by. Each succeeding revolution increased the interest and admiration and people soon began to favour him with frankly unabashed stares and smiles that could not have been mistaken for anything but tribute to his extreme good looks.

He stood between the gaunt, soldierly old man with the fierce moustache, and the trim, military young man with one that was close cropped and smart. Each wore a blue serge suit and affected a short visored cap of the same material, and each lazily puffed at a very commonplace briar pipe. They in turn were watching the sprightly parade with an interest that was calmly impersonal. They saw no one person who deserved more than a casual glance, and yet the motley crowd passed before them, apparently without end, as if expecting a responsive smile of recognition from the tall young fellow to whom it paid the honest tribute of curiosity.

The customary he-gossip and perennial snooper who is always making the voyage no matter what ship one takes or the direction one goes, nosed out the purser and discovered that the young man was R. Schmidt of Vienna. He was busy thereafter mixing with the throng, volunteering information that had not been solicited but which appeared to be welcome. Especially were the young women on board grateful to the he-gossip, when he accosted them as a perfect stranger to tell them the name of another and even more perfect stranger.

"Evidently an Austrian army officer," he always proclaimed, and that seemed to settle it.

Luckily he did not overhear R. Schmidt's impassive estimate of the first cabin parade, or he might have had something to repeat that would not have pleased those who took part in it.

"Queer looking lot of people," said R. Schmidt, and his two companions moodily nodded their heads.

"I am sorry we lost those rooms on the *Salammbo*," said the younger of his two companions. "I had them positively engaged, money paid down."

"Some one else came along with more money, Dank," observed R. Schmidt. "We ought to be thankful that we received anything at all. Has it occurred to you that this boat isn't crowded?"

"Not more than half full," said the older man. "All of the others appeared to be packed from hold to funnel. This must be an unpopular boat."

"I don't know where we'd be, however, if Mr. Blithers hadn't thought of the *Jupiter* almost at the last minute," said R. Schmidt.

"Nine day boat, though," growled the old man.

"I don't mind that in the least. She's a steady old tub and that's something."

"Hobbs tells me that it is most extraordinary to find the east bound steamers crowded at this season of the year," said Dank. "He can't understand it at all. The crowds go over in June and July and by this time they should be starting for home. I thought we'd have no difficulty in getting on any one of the big

boats, but, by jove, everywhere I went they said they were full up."

"It was uncommonly decent of Blithers not coming down to see us off," said the elderly man, who was down on the passenger list as Totten. "I was apprehensive, 'pon my soul. He stuck like a leech up to the last minute."

R. Schmidt was reflecting. "It struck me as queer that he had not heard of the transfer of our securities in London."

"I cannot understand Bernstein & Sons selling out at a time when the price of our bonds is considerably below their actual value," said Totten, frowning. "A million pounds sterling is what their holdings really represented; according to the despatches they must have sold at a loss of nearly fifty thousand pounds. It is unbelievable that the house can be hard-pressed for money. There isn't a sounder concern in Europe than Bernstein's."

"We should have a Marconi-gram to-night or to-morrow in regard to the bid made in Paris for the bonds held by the French syndicate," said Dank, pulling at his short moustache. "Mr. Blithers is investigating."

"There is something sinister in all this," said R. Schmidt. "Who is buying up all of the out-standing bonds and what is behind the movement? London has sold all that were held there and Paris is approached on the same day. If Paris and Berlin should sell, nearly four million pounds in Graustark bonds will be

in the hands of people whose identity and motives appear to be shrouded in the deepest mystery."

"And four million pounds represents the entire amount of our bonds held by outside parties," said Totten, with a significant shake of his grizzled head. "The remainder are in the possession of our own institutions and the people themselves. We should hear from Edelweiss, too, in response to my cablegram. Perhaps Romano may be able to throw light on the situation. I confess that I am troubled."

"Russia would have no object in buying up our general bonds, would she?" inquired R. Schmidt.

"None whatever. She would have nothing to gain. Mr. Blithers assured me that he was not in the least apprehensive. In fact, he declared that Russia would not be buying bonds that do not mature for twelve years to come. There must be some private — eh?"

A steward was politely accosting the trio.

"I beg pardon, is this Mr. Totten?"

"Yes."

"Message for you, sir, at the purser's."

"Bring it to my stateroom, Totten," said R. Schmidt briefly, and the old man hurried away on the heels of the messenger.

The two young men sauntered carelessly in an opposite direction and soon disappeared from the deck. A few minutes later, Totten entered the luxurious parlour of R. Schmidt and laid an unopened wireless message on the table at the young man's elbow.

"Open it, Totten."

The old man slit the envelope and glanced at the contents. He nodded his head in answer to an unspoken question.

"Sold?" asked R. Schmidt.

"Paris and Berlin, both of them, Prince. Every bond has been gobbled up."

"Does he mention the name of the buyer?"

"Only by the use of the personal pronoun. He says—'I have taken over the Paris and Berlin holdings. All is well.' It is signed 'B.' So! Now we know."

"By jove!" fell from the lips of both men, and then the three Graustarkians stared in speechless amazement at each other for the space of a minute before another word was spoken.

"Blithers!" exclaimed Dank, sinking back into his chair.

"Blithers," repeated Totten, but with an entirely different inflection. The word was conviction itself as he pronounced it.

R. Schmidt indulged in a wry little smile. "It amounts to nearly twenty million dollars, Count. That's a great deal of money to spend in the pursuit of an idle whim."

"Humph!" grunted the old Count, and then favoured the sunny-faced Prince with a singularly sharp glance. "Of course, you understand his game?"

"Perfectly. It's as clear as day. He intends to

be the crown father-in-law. I suppose he will expect Graustark to establish an Order of Royal Grandfathers."

"It may prove to be no jest, Robin," said the Count seriously.

"My dear Quinnox, don't look so sad," cried the Prince. "He may have money enough to buy Graustark but he hasn't enough to buy grandchildren that won't grow, you know. He is counting chickens before they're hatched, which isn't a good business principle, I'd have you to know."

"What was it he said to you at Red Roof?"

"That was nothing. Pure bluster."

"He said he had never set his heart on anything that he didn't get in the end, wasn't that it?"

"I think so. Something of the sort. I took it as a joke."

"Well, I took it as a threat."

"A threat?"

"A pleasant, agreeable threat, of course. He has set his heart on having the crown of Graustark worn by a Blithers. That is the long and short of it."

"I believe he did say to me in the woods that day that he could put his daughter on any throne in Europe if he set his mind to the job," said the Prince carelessly. "But you see, the old gentleman is not counting on two very serious sources of opposition when it comes to this particular case. There is Maud, you see,— and me."

"I am not so sure of the young lady," said the

Count sententiously. "The opposition may falter a bit there, and half of his battle is won."

"You seem to forget, Quinnox, that such a marriage is utterly impossible," said the Prince coldly. "Do you imagine that I would marry —"

"Pardon me, highness, I said *half* the battle would be won. I do contemplate a surrender on your part. You are a very pig-headed young man. The most pig-headed I've ever known, if you will forgive me for expressing myself so —"

"You've said it a hundred times," laughed the Prince, good-naturedly. "Don't apologise. Not only you but the entire House of Nobles have characterised me as pig-headed and I have never even thought of resenting it, so it must be that I believe it to be true."

"We have never voiced the opinion, highness, except in reference to our own great desire to bring about the union between our beloved ruler and the Crown Princess of —"

"So," interrupted R. Schmidt, "it ought to be very clear to you that if I will not marry to please my loyal, devoted cabinet I certainly shall not marry to please William W. Blithers. No doubt the excellent Maud is a most desirable person. In any event, she has a mind of her own. I confess that I am sorry to have missed seeing her. We might have got on famously together, seeing that our point of view is apparently unique in this day and age of the world. No, my good friends, Mr. Blithers is making a poor

investment. He will not get the return for his money that he is expecting. If it pleases him to buy our securities, all well and good. He shall lose nothing in the end. But he will find that Graustark is not a toy, nor the people puppets. More than all that, I am not a bargain sale prince with Christmas tree aspirations, but a very unamiable devil who cultivates an ambition to throw stones at the conventions. Not only do I intend to choose my wife but also the court grandfather. And now let us forget the folly of Mr. Blithers and discuss his methods of business. What does he expect to gain by this extraordinary investment?"

Count Quinnox looked at him rather pityingly. "It appears to be his way of pulling the strings, my boy. He has loaned us something like sixteen millions of dollars. We have agreed to deposit our public service bonds as security against the loan, so that practically equalises the situation. It becomes a purely business transaction. But he sees far ahead. This loan of his matures at practically the same time that our first series of government bonds are due for payment. It will be extremely difficult for a small country, such as Graustark, to raise nearly forty millions of dollars in, say ten years. The European syndicates undoubtedly would be willing to renew the loan under a new issue — I think it is called refunding, or something of the sort. But Mr. Blithers will be in a position to say no to any such arrangement. He holds the whip hand and —"

"But, my dear Count," interrupted the Prince, "what if he does hold it? Does he expect to wait ten years before exercising his power? You forget that marriage is his ambition. Isn't he taking a desperate risk in assuming that I will not marry before the ten years are up? And, for that matter, his daughter may decide to wed some other chap who —"

"That's just the point," said Quinnox. "He is arranging it so that you *can't* marry without his consent."

"The deuce you say!"

"I am not saying that he can carry out his design, my dear boy, but it is his secret hope, just the same. So far as Graustark is concerned, she will stand by you no matter what betides. As you know, there is nothing so dear to our hearts as the proposed union of Dawsbergen's Crown Princess and —"

"That's utterly out of the question, Count," said the Prince, setting his jaws.

The count sighed patiently. "So you say, my boy, so you say. But you are not reasonable. How can you know that the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen is not the very mate your soul has been craving —"

"That's not the point. I am opposed to this miserable custom of giving in marriage without the consent of the people most vitally concerned, and I shall never recede from my position."

"You are very young, my dear Prince."

"And I intend to remain young, my dear Count. Loveless marriages make old men and women of youths

and maidens. I remember thinking that remark out for myself after a great deal of effort, and you may remember that I sprung it with considerable effect on the cabinet when the matter was formally discussed a year or two ago. You heard about it, didn't you, Dank?"

"I did, highness."

"And every newspaper in the world printed it as coming from me, didn't they? Well, there you are. I can't go behind my publicly avowed principles."

The young fellow stretched his long body in a sort of luxurious defiance, and eyed his companions somewhat combatively.

"Sounds very well," growled the Count, with scant reverence for royalty, being a privileged person.

"Now, Dank here can marry any one he likes — if she'll have him — and he is only a lieutenant of the guard. Why should I,— prince royal and master of all he surveys, so to speak,— why should I be denied a privilege enjoyed by every good-looking soldier who carries a sword in my army — *my* army, do you understand? I leave it to you, Dank, is it fair? Who are you that you should presume to think of a happy marriage while I, your Prince, am obliged to twiddle my thumbs and say 'all right, bring any old thing along and I'll marry her'? Who are you, Dank, that's what I'd like to know."

His humour was so high-handed that the two soldiers laughed and Dank ruefully admitted that he was a lucky dog.

"You shall not marry into the Blithers family, my lad, if we can help it," said the Count, pulling at his moustaches.

"I should say not!" said Dank, feeling for his.

"I should as soon marry a daughter of Hobbs," said R. Schmidt, getting up from his chair with restored sprightliness. "If he had one, I mean."

"The bonds of matrimony and the bonds of government are by no means synonymous," said Dank, and felt rather proud of himself when his companions favoured him with a stare of amazement. The excellent lieutenant was not given to persiflage. He felt that for a moment he had scintillated.

"Shall we send a wireless to Blithers congratulating him on his coup?" enquired the Prince gaily.

"No," said the Count. "Congratulating ourselves on his coup is better."

"Good! And you might add that we also are trusting to luck. It may give him something to think about. And now where is Hobbs?" said royalty.

"Here, sir," said Hobbs, appearing in the bed-room door, but not unexpectedly. "I heard wot you said about my daughter, sir. It may set your mind at rest, sir, to hear that I am childless."

"Thank you, Hobbs. You are always thinking of my comfort. You may order luncheon for us in the Ritz restaurant. The head steward has been instructed to reserve the corner table for the whole voyage."

"The 'ead waiter, sir," corrected Hobbs politely, and was gone.

In three minutes he was back with the information that two ladies had taken the table and refused to be dislodged, although the head waiter had vainly tried to convince them that it was reserved for the passage by R. Schmidt and party.

"I am quite sure, sir, he put it to them very hagreeably and politely, but the young lady gave 'im the 'aughtiest look I've ever seen on mortal fice, sir, and he came back to me so 'umble that I could 'ardly believe he was an 'ead waiter."

"I hope he was not unnecessarily persistent," said the Prince, annoyed. "It really is of no consequence where we sit."

"Ladies first, world without end," said Dank. "Especially at sea."

"He was not persistent, sir. In fact he was hextraordinary subdued all the time he was hexplaining the situation to them. I could tell by the way his back looked, sir."

"Never mind, Hobbs. You ordered luncheon?"

"Yes, your 'ighness. Chops and sweet potatoes and —"

"But that's what we had yesterday, Hobbs."

A vivid red overspread the suddenly dismayed face of Hobbs. "'Pon my soul, sir, I — I clean forgot that it was yesterday I was thinking of. The young lady gave me such a sharp look, sir, when the 'ead

waiter pointed at me that I clean forgot wot I was there for. I will 'urry back and —"

"Do, Hobbs, that's a good fellow. I'm as hungry as a bear. But no chops!"

"Thank you, sir. No chops. Absolutely, sir." He stopped in the doorway. "I daresay it was 'er beauty, sir, that did it. No chops. Quite so, sir."

"If Blithers were only here," sighed Dank. "He would make short work of the female invasion. He would have them chucked overboard."

"I beg pardon, sir," further adventured Hobbs, "but I fancy not even Mr. Blithers could move that young woman, sir, if she didn't 'appen to want to be moved. Never in my life, sir, have I seen —"

"Run along, Hobbs," said the Prince. "Boiled guinea hen."

"And cantaloupe, sir. Yes, sir, I quite remember everything now, sir."

Twenty minutes later, R. Schmidt, seated in the Ritz restaurant, happened to look fairly into the eyes of the loveliest girl he had ever seen, and on the instant forgave the extraordinary delinquency of the hitherto infallible Hobbs.

CHAPTER IX

THE PRINCE MEETS MISS GUILE

Later on R. Schmidt sat alone in a sheltered corner of the promenade deck, where chairs had been secured by the forehanded Hobbs. The thin drizzle now aspired to something more definite in the shape of a steady downpour, and the decks were almost deserted, save for the few who huddled in the unexposed nooks where the sweep and swish of the rain failed to penetrate. There was a faraway look in the young man's eyes, as of one who dreams pleasantly, with little effort but excellent effect. His pipe had gone out, so his dream must have been long and uninterrupted. Eight bells sounded, but what is time to a dreamer? Then came one bell and two, and now his eyes were closed.

Two women came and stood over him, but little did they suspect that his dream was of one of them: the one with the lovely eyes and the soft brown hair. They surveyed him, whispering, the one with a little perplexed frown on her brow, the other with distinct signs of annoyance in her face. The girl was not more than twenty, her companion quite old enough to be her mother: a considerate if not complimentary estimate, for a girl's mother may be either forty, fifty or even fifty-five, when you come to think of it.

They were looking for something. That was quite clear. And it was deplorably clear that whatever it was, R. Schmidt was sitting upon it. They saw that he was asleep, which made the search if not the actual recovery quite out of the question. The older woman was on the point of poking the sleeper with the toe of her shoe, being a matter-of-fact sort of person, when the girl imperatively shook her head and frowned upon the lady in a way to prove that even though she was old enough to be the mother of a girl of twenty she was by no means the mother of this one.

At that very instant, R. Schmidt opened his eyes. It must have been a kindly poke by the god of sleep that aroused him so opportunely, but even so, the toe of a shoe could not have created a graver catastrophe than that which immediately befell him. He completely lost his head. If one had suddenly asked what had become of it, he couldn't have told, not for the life of him. For that matter, he couldn't have put his finger, so to speak, on any part of his person and proclaimed with confidence that it belonged to R. Schmidt of Vienna. He was looking directly up into a pair of dark, startled eyes, in which there was a very pretty confusion and a far from impervious blink.

"I beg your pardon," said the older woman, without the faintest trace of embarrassment,— indeed, with some asperity,—"I think you are occupying one of our chairs."

He scrambled out of the steamer rug and came to his feet, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, and found his awkwardness rewarded by an extremely sweet smile — in the eyes of the one he addressed.

"We were looking for a letter that I am quite sure was left in my chair," said she.

"A letter?" he murmured vaguely, and at once began to search with his eyes.

"From her father," volunteered the elderly one, as if it were a necessary bit of information. Then she jerked the rug away and three pairs of eyes examined the place where R. Schmidt had been reclining. "That's odd. Did you happen to see it when you sat down, sir?"

"I am confident that there was no letter —" began he, and then allowed his gaze to rest on the name-card at the top of the chair. "This happens to be *my* chair, madam," he went on, pointing to the card. "'R. Schmidt.' I am very sorry."

"The steward must have put that card there while you were at luncheon, dear. What right has he to sell our chairs over again? I shall report this to the Captain —"

"I am quite positive that this is my chair, sir," said the girl, a spot of red in each cheek. "It was engaged two days ago. I have been occupying it since — but it really doesn't matter. It has your name on it now, so I suppose I shall have to —"

"Not at all," he made haste to say. "It is yours. There has been some miserable mistake. These deck stewards are always messing things up. Still, it is

rather a mystery about the letter. I assure you I saw no —"

"No doubt the steward who changed the cards had sufficient intelligence to remove all incriminating evidence," said she coolly. "We shall find it among the lost, strayed and stolen articles, no doubt. Pray retain the chair, Mr.—" She peered at the name-card —"Mr. Schmidt."

Her cool insolence succeeded in nettling a nature that was usually most gentle. He spoke with characteristic directness.

"Thank you, I shall do so. We thereby manage to strike a fair average. I seize your deck chair, you seize my table. We are quits."

She smiled faintly. "R. Schmidt did not sound young and gentle, but old and hateful. That is why I seized the table. I expected to find R. Schmidt a fat, old German with very bad manners. Instead, you are neither fat, old, nor disagreeable. You took it very nicely, Mr. Schmidt, and I am undone. Won't you permit me to restore your table to you?"

The elderly lady was tapping the deck with a most impatient foot. "Really my dear, we were quite within our rights in approaching the head waiter. He —"

"He said it was engaged," interrupted the young lady. "R. Schmidt was the name he gave and I informed him it meant nothing to me. I am very sorry, Mr. Schmidt. I suppose it was all because I am so accustomed to having my own way."

"In that case, it is all very easy to understand," said he, "for I have always longed to be in a position where I could have my own way. I am sure that if I could have it, I would be a most overbearing, selfish person."

"We must enquire at the office for the letter, my dear, before —"

"It may have dropped behind the chair," said the girl.

"Right!" cried R. Schmidt, dragging the chair away and pointing in triumph at the missing letter. He stooped to recover the missive, but she was quick to forestall him. With a little gasp she pounced upon it and, like a child proceeded to hold it behind her back. He stiffened. "I remember that you said it was from your father."

She hesitated an instant and then held it forth for his inspection, rather adroitly concealing the post-mark with her thumb. It was addressed to "Miss B. Guile, S. S. *Jupiter*, New York City, N. Y.," and type-written.

"It is only fair that we should be quits in every particular," she said, with a frank smile.

He bowed. "A letter of introduction," he said, "in the strictest sense of the word. You have already had my card thrust upon you, so everything is quite regular. And now it is only right and proper that I should see what has become of your chairs. Permit me —"

"Really, Miss Guile," interposed her companion,

"this is quite irregular. I may say it is unusual. Pray allow me to suggest —"

"I think it is only right that Mr. Schmidt should return good for evil," interrupted the girl gaily. "Please enquire, Mr. Schmidt. No doubt the deck steward will know."

Again the Prince bowed, but this time there was amusement instead of uncertainty in his eyes. It was the first time that any one had ever urged him, even by inference, to "fetch and carry." Moreover, she was extremely cool about it, as one who exacts much of young men in serge suits and outing-caps. He found himself wondering what she would say if he were to suddenly announce that he was the Prince of Graustark. The thought tickled his fancy, accounting, no doubt, for the even deeper bow that he gave her.

"They can't be very far away," he observed quite meekly. "Oh, I say, steward! One moment, here." A deck steward approached with alacrity. "What has become of Miss Guile's chair?"

The man touched his cap and beamed joyously upon the fair young lady.

"Ach! See how I have forget! It is here! The best place on the deck — on any deck. See! Two — side by side,— above the door, away from the draft — see, in the corner, ha, ha! Yes! Two by side. The very best. Miss Guile complains of the draft from the door. I exchanged the chairs. See! But I forgot to speak. Yes! See!"

And, sure enough, there were the chairs of Miss

Guile and her companion snugly stowed away in the corner, standing at right angles to the long row that lined the deck, the foot rests pointed directly at the chair R. Schmidt had just vacated, not more than a yard and a half away.

"How stupid!" exclaimed Miss Guile. "Thank you, steward. This is much better. So sorry, Mr. Schmidt, to have disturbed you. I abhor drafts, don't you?"

"Not to the extent that I shall move out of this one," he replied gallantly, "now that I've got an undisputed claim to it. I intend to stand up for my rights, Miss Guile, even though you find me at your feet."

"How perfectly love —" began Miss Guile, a gleam of real enthusiasm in her eyes. A sharp, horrified look from her companion served as a check, and she became at once the coolly indifferent creature who exacts everything. "Thank you, Mr. Schmidt, for being so nice when we were trying so hard to be horrid."

"But you don't know how nice you are when you are trying to be horrid," he remarked. "Are you not going to sit down, now that we've captured the disappearing chair?"

"No," she said, and he fancied he saw regret in her eyes. "I am going to my room,— if I can find it. No doubt it also is lost. This seems to be a day for misplacing things."

"At any rate, permit me to thank you for discovering me, Miss Guile."

"Oh, I daresay I shall misplace you, too, Mr. Schmidt." She said it so insolently that he flushed as he drew himself up and stepped aside to allow her to pass. For an instant their eyes met, and the sign of the humble was not to be found in the expression of either.

"Even *that* will be something for me to look forward to, Miss Guile," said he. Far from being vexed, she favoured him with a faint smile of — was it wonder or admiration?

Then she moved away, followed by the uneasy lady — who was old enough to be her mother and wasn't.

Robin remained standing for a moment, looking after her, and somehow he felt that his dream was not yet ended. She turned the corner of the deck building and was lost to sight. He sat down, only to arise almost instantly, moved by a livelier curiosity than he ever had felt before. Conscious of a certain feeling of stealth, he scrutinised the cards in the backs of the two chairs. The steward was collecting the discarded steamer-rugs farther down the deck, and the few passengers who occupied chairs, appeared to be snoozing,— all of which he took in with his first appraising glance. "Miss Guile" and "Mrs. Gaston" were the names he read.

"Americans," he mused. "Young lady and chaperone, that's it. A real American beauty! And Blithers loudly boasts that his daughter is the prettiest girl in America! Shades of Venus! Can there be such a thing on earth as a prettier girl than this one?

Can nature have performed the impossible? Is America so full of lovely girls that this one must take second place to a daughter of Blithers? I wonder if she knows the imperial Maud. I'll make it a point to inquire."

Moved by a sudden restlessness, he decided that he was in need of exercise. A walk would do him good. The same spirit of restlessness, no doubt, urged him to walk rather rapidly in the direction opposite to that taken by the lovely Miss Guile. After completely circling the deck once he decided that he did not need the exercise after all. His walk had not benefitted him in the least. She *had* gone to her room. He returned to his chair, conscious of having been defeated but without really knowing why or how. As he turned into the dry, snug corner, he came to an abrupt stop and stared. Miss Guile was sitting in her chair, neatly encased in a mummy-like sheath of grey that covered her slim body to the waist.

She was quite alone in her nook, and reading. Evidently the book interested her, for she failed to look up when he clumsily slid into his chair and threw the rug over his legs — dreadfully long, uninteresting legs, he thought, as he stretched them out and found that his feet protruded like a pair of white obelisks.

Naturally he looked seaward, but in his mind's eye he saw her as he had seen her not more than ten minutes before: a slim, tall girl in a smart buff coat, with a limp white hat drawn down over her hair by means of a bright green veil; he had had a glimpse of staunch tan

walking-shoes. He found himself wondering how he had missed her in the turn about the deck, and how she could have ensconced herself so snugly during his brief evacuation of the spot. Suddenly it occurred to him that she had returned to the chair only after discovering that his was vacant. It wasn't a very gratifying conclusion.

An astonishing intrepidity induced him to speak to her after a lapse of five or six minutes, and so surprising was the impulse that he blurted out his question without preamble.

"How did you manage to get back so quickly?" he inquired.

She looked up, and for an instant there was something like alarm in her lovely eyes, as of one caught in the perpetration of a guilty act.

"I beg your pardon," she said, rather indistinctly.

"I was away less than eight minutes," he declared, and she was confronted by the wonderfully frank smile that never failed to work its charm. To his surprise, a shy smile grew in her eyes, and her warm red lips twitched uncertainly. He had expected a cold rebuff. "You must have dropped through the awning."

"Your imagination is superior to that employed by the author of this book," she said, "and that is saying a good deal, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Schmidt," he supplied cheerfully. "May I inquire what book you are reading?"

"You would not be interested. It is by an American."

"I have read a great many American novels," said he stiffly. "My father was an American. Awfully jolly books, most of them."

"I looked you up in the passenger list a moment ago," she said coolly. "Your home is in Vienna. I like Vienna."

He was looking rather intently at the book, now partly lowered. "Isn't that the passenger list you have concealed in that book?" he demanded.

"It is," she replied promptly. "You will pardon a natural curiosity? I wanted to see whether you were from New York."

"May I look at it, please?"

She closed the book. "It isn't necessary. I *am* from New York."

"By the way, do you happen to know a Miss Blithers,— Maud Blithers?"

Miss Guile frowned reflectively. "Blithers? The name is a familiar one. Maud Blithers? What is she like?"

"She's supposed to be very good-looking. I've never seen her."

"How queer to be asking me if I know her, then. Why *do* you ask?"

"I've heard so much about her lately. She is the daughter of William Blithers, the great capitalist."

"Oh, I know who he is," she exclaimed. "Perfect roodles of money, hasn't he?"

"Roodles?"

"Loads, if it means more to you. I forgot that you are a foreigner. He gave that wonderful ball last week for the Prince of — of — Oh, some insignificant little place over in Europe. There are such a lot of queer little duchies and principalities, don't you know; it is quite impossible to tell one from the other. They don't even appear on the maps."

He took it with a perfectly straight face, though secretly annoyed. "It was the talk of the town, that ball. It must have cost roodles of money. Is that right?"

"Yes, but it doesn't sound right when you say it. Naturally one doesn't say roodles in Vienna."

"We say noodles," said he. "I am very fond of them. But to resume; I supposed every one in New York knew Miss Blithers. She's quite the rage, I'm told."

"Indeed? I should think she might be, Mr. Schmidt, with all those lovely millions behind her."

He smiled introspectively. "Yes; and I am told that, in spite of them, she is the prettiest girl in New York."

She appeared to lose interest in the topic. "Oh, indeed?"

"But," he supplemented gracefully, "it isn't true."

"What isn't true?"

"The statement that she is the prettiest girl in New York."

"How can you say that, when you admit you've never seen her?"

"I can say it with a perfectly clear conscience, Miss Guile," said he, and was filled with delight when she bit her lip as a sign of acknowledgment.

"Oh, here comes the tea," she cried, with a strange eagerness in her voice. "I am so glad." She scrambled gracefully out of her rug and arose to her feet.

"Aren't you going to have some?" he cried.

"Yes," she said, quite pointedly. "In my room, Mr. Schmidt," and before he could get to his feet she was moving away without so much as a nod or smile for him. Indeed, she appeared to have dismissed him from her thoughts quite as completely as from her vision. He experienced a queer sensation of shrivelling.

At dinner that night, she failed to look in his direction, a circumstance that may not appear extraordinary when it is stated that she purposely or inadvertently exchanged seats with Mrs. Gaston and sat with her back to the table occupied by R. Schmidt and his friends. He had to be content with a view of the most exquisite back and shoulders that good fortune had ever allowed him to gaze upon. And then there was the way that her soft brown hair grew above the slender neck, to say nothing of — but Mrs. Gaston was watching him with most unfriendly eyes, so the feast was spoiled.

The following day was as unlike its predecessor as black is like white. During the night the smooth

grey pond had been transformed into a turbulent, storm-threshed ocean; the once gentle wind was now a howling gale that swept the decks with a merciless lash in its grip and whipped into submission all who vaingloriously sought to defy its chill dominion. Not rain, but spray from huge, swashing billows, clouded the decks, biting and cutting like countless needles, each drop with the sting of a hornet behind it. Now the end of the world seemed far away, and the jumping off place was a rickety wall of white and black, leaning against a cold, drear sky.

Only the hardiest of the passengers ventured on deck; the exhilaration they professed was but another name for bravado. They shivered and gasped for breath as they forged their bitter way into the gale, and few were they who took more than a single turn of the deck. Like beaten cowards they soon slunk into the sheltered spots, or sought even less heroic means of surrender by tumbling into bed with the considerate help of unsmiling stewards. The great ship went up and the great ship came down: when up so high that the sky seemed to be startlingly near and down so horribly low that the bottom of the ocean was even nearer. And it creaked and groaned and sighed even above the wild monody of the wind, like a thing in misery, yet all the while holding its sides to keep from bursting with laughter over the plight of the little creature whom God made after His own image but not until after all of the big things of the universe had been designed.

R. Schmidt, being a good sailor and a hardy young chap, albeit a prince of royal blood, was abroad early, after a breakfast that staggered the few who remained unstaggered up to that particular crisis. A genial sailor-man and an equally ungenial deck swabber advised him, in totally different styles of address, to stay below if he knew what was good for him, only to be thanked with all the blitheness of a man who jolly well knows what is good for him, or who doesn't care whether it is good for him or not so long as he is doing the thing that he wants to do.

He took two turns about the deck, and each time as he passed the spot he sent a covert glance into the corner where Miss Guile's chair was standing. Of course he did not expect to find her there in weather like this, but — well, he looked and that is the end to the argument. The going was extremely treacherous and unpleasant he was free to confess to the genial sailor-man after the second breathless turn, and gave that worthy a bright silver dollar upon receiving a further bit of advice: to sit down somewhere out of the wind, sir.

Quinnox and Dank were hopelessly bed-ridden, so to speak. They were very disagreeable, cross and unpleasant, and somehow he felt that they hated their cheerful, happy-faced Prince. Never before had Count Quinnox scowled at him, no matter how mad his pranks as a child or how silly his actions as a youth. Never before had any one told him to go to the devil. He rather liked it. And he rather ad-

mired poor Dank for ordering him out of his cabin, with a perfectly astounding oath as a climax to the command. Moreover, he thought considerably better of the faithful Hobbs for an amazing exposition of human equality in the matter of a pair of boots that he desired to wear that morning but which happened to be stowed away in a cabin trunk. He told Hobbs to go to the devil and Hobbs repeated the injunction, with especial heat, to the boots, when he bumped his head in hauling them out of the trunk. Whereupon R. Schmidt said to Hobbs: "Good for you, Hobbs. Go on, please. Don't mind me. It was quite a thump, wasn't it?" And Hobbs managed, between other words, to say that it was a whacking thump, and one he would not forget to his dying day — (if he lived through this one!).

"And you'd do well to sit in the smoke-room, sir," further advised the sailor-man, clinging to the rail with one hand and pocketing the coin with the other.

"No," said R. Schmidt resolutely. "I don't like the air in the smoke-room."

"There's quite a bit of air out 'ere, sir."

"I need quite a bit."

"I should think you might, sir, being a 'ealthy, strappin' sort of a chap, sir. 'Elp yourself. All the chairs is yours if you'll unpile 'em."

The young man battled his way down the deck and soon found himself in the well-protected corner. A half-dozen unoccupied chairs were cluttered about, having been abandoned by persons who over-estimated

their hardiness. One of the stewards was engaged in stacking them up and making them fast.

Miss Guile's chair and that of Mrs. Gaston were staunchly fastened down and their rugs were in place. R. Schmidt experienced an exquisite sensation of pleasure. Here was a perfect exemplification of that much-abused thing known as circumstantial evidence. She contemplated coming on deck. So he had his chair put in place, called for his rug, shrugged his chin down into the collar of his thick ulster, and sat down to wait.

CHAPTER X

AN HOUR ON DECK

She literally was blown into his presence. He sprang to his feet to check her swift approach before she could be dashed against the wall or upon the heap of chairs in the corner. The deep roll of the vessel had ended so suddenly that she was thrown off her balance, at best precariously maintained in the hurricane that swept her along the deck. She was projected with considerable violence against the waiting figure of R. Schmidt, who had hastily braced himself for the impact of the slender body in the thick sea-ulster. She uttered an excited little shriek as she came bang up against him and found his ready arms closing about her shoulders.

"Oh, goodness!" she gasped, with what little breath she had left, and then began to laugh as she freed herself in confusion — a very pretty confusion he recalled later on, after he had recovered to some extent from the effects of an exceedingly severe bump on the back of his head. "How awkward!"

"Not at all," he proclaimed, retaining a grip on one of her arms until the ship showed some signs of resuming its way eastward instead of downward.

"I am sure it must have hurt dreadfully," she cried. "Nothing hurts worse than a bump. It

seemed as though you must have splintered the wall."

"I have a singularly hard head," said he, and forthwith felt of the back of it.

"Will you please stand ready to receive boarders? My maid is following me, poor thing, and I can't afford to have her smashed to pieces. Here she is!"

Quite a pretty maid, with wide, horrified eyes and a pale green complexion came hustling around the corner. R. Schmidt, albeit a prince, received her with open arms.

"Merci, M'sieur!" she squealed and added something in muffled French that strangely reminded him of what Hobbs had said in English. Then she deposited an armful of rugs and magazines at Robin's feet, and clutched wildly at a post actually some ten feet away but which appeared to be coming toward her with obliging swiftness, so nicely was the deck rotating for her. "Mon dieu! Mon dieu!"

"You may go back to bed, Marie," cried her mistress in some haste.

"But ze rug, I feex it—" groaned the unhappy maid, and then once more: "Merci, M'sieur!" She clung to the arm he extended, and tried bravely to smile her thanks.

"Here! Go in through this door," he said, bracing the door open with his elbow. "You'll be all right in a little while. Keep your nerve." He closed the door after her and turned to the amused Miss Guile. "Well, it's an ill wind that blows no good," he said enigmatically, and she flushed under the steady smile

in his eyes. "Allow me to arrange your rug for you, Miss Guile."

"Thank you, no. I think I would better go inside. It is really too windy —"

"The wind can't get at you back here in this cubby-hole," he protested. "Do sit down. I'll have you as snug as a bug in a rug before you can say Jack Robinson. See! Now stick 'em out and I'll wrap it around them. There! You're as neatly done up as a mummy and a good deal better off, because you are a long way short of being two thousand years old."

"How is your head, Mr. Schmidt?" she inquired with grave concern. "You seem to be quite crazy. I hope —"

"Every one is a little bit mad, don't you think? Especially in moments of great excitement. I dare-say my head *has* been turned quite appreciably, and I'm glad that you've been kind enough to notice it. Where is Mrs. Gaston?" He was vastly exhilarated.

She regarded him with eyes that sparkled and belied the unamiable nature of her reply.

"The poor lady is where she is not at all likely to be annoyed, Mr. Schmidt."

Then she took up a magazine and coolly began to run through the pages. He waited for a moment, considerably dashed, and then said "Oh," in a very unfriendly manner. She found her place in the magazine, assumed a more comfortable position, and, with noteworthy resolution, set about reading as if her life depended upon it.

He sat down, pulled the rug up to his chin, and stared out at the great, heaving billows. Suddenly remembering another injury, he felt once more of the back of his head.

"By jove!" he exclaimed "There *is* a lump there."

"I can't hear you," she said, allowing the magazine to drop into her lap, but keeping her place carefully marked with one of her fingers.

"I can hear you perfectly," he said.

"It's the way the wind blows," she explained.

"Easily remedied," said he. "I'll move into Mrs. Gaston's chair if you think it will help any."

"Do!" she said promptly. "You will not disturb me in the least,— unless you talk." She resumed her reading, half a page above the finger tip.

He moved over and arranged himself comfortably, snugly in Mrs. Gaston's chair. Their elbows almost met. He was prepared to be very patient. For a long time she continued to read, her warm, rosy cheek half-averted, her eyes applied to their task with irritating constancy. He did not despair. Some wise person once had told him that it was only necessary to give a woman sufficient time and she would be the one to despair.

A few passengers possessed of proud sea-legs, staggered past the snug couple on their ridiculous rounds of the ship. If they thought of Miss Guile and R. Schmidt at all it was with the scorn that is usually devoted to youth at its very best. There could be no

doubt in the passing mind that these two were sweethearts who managed to thrive on the smallest of comforts.

At last his patience was rewarded. She lowered the magazine and stifled a yawn — but not a real one.

"Have you read it?" she inquired composedly.

"A part of it," he said. "Over your shoulder."

"Is that considered polite in Vienna?"

"If you only knew what a bump I've got on the back of my head you wouldn't be so ungracious," he said.

"I couldn't possibly know, could I?"

He leaned forward and indicated the spot on the back of his head, first removing his cap. She laughed nervously, and then gently rubbed her fingers over the thick hair.

"There is a dreadful lump!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how sorry I am. Do — do you feel faint or — or — I mean, is it very painful?"

"Not now," he replied, replacing his cap and favouring her with his most engaging smile.

She smiled in response, betraying not the slightest sign of embarrassment. As a matter of fact, she was, if anything, somewhat too self-possessed.

"I remember falling down stairs once," she said, "and getting a stupendous bump on my forehead. But that was a great many years ago and I cried. How was I to know that it hurt you, Mr. Schmidt, when you neglected to cry?"

"Heroes never cry," said he. "It isn't considered first-class fiction, you know."

"Am I to regard you as a hero?"

"If you will be so kind, please."

She laughed outright at this. "I think I rather like you, Mr. Schmidt," she said, with unexpected candour.

"Oh, I fancy I'm not at all bad," said he, after a momentary stare of astonishment. "I am especially good in rough weather," he went on, trying to forget that he was a prince of the royal blood, a rather difficult matter when one stops to consider he was not in the habit of hearing people say that they rather liked him.

"Do your friends come from Vienna?" she inquired abruptly.

"Yes," he said, and then saved his face as usual by adding under his breath: "but they don't live there." It was not in him to lie outright, hence the handy way of appeasing his conscience.

"They are very interesting looking men, especially the younger. I cannot remember when I have seen a more attractive man."

"He is a splendid chap," exclaimed Robin, with genuine enthusiasm. "I am very fond of Dank."

She was silent for a moment. Something had failed, and she was rather glad of it.

"Do you like New York?" she asked.

"Immensely. I met a great many delightful people there, Miss Guile. You say you do not know the

Blithers family? Mr. Blithers is a rare old bird."

"Isn't there some talk of his daughter being engaged to the Prince of Graustark?"

He felt that his ears were red. "The newspapers hinted at something of the sort, I believe." He was suddenly possessed by the curious notion that he was being "pumped" by his fair companion. Indeed, a certain insistent note had crept into her voice and her eyes were searching his with an intentness that had not appeared in them until now.

"Have you seen him?"

"The Prince?"

"Yes. What is he like?"

"I've seen pictures of him," he equivocated. "Rather nice looking, I should say."

"Of course he is like all foreign noblemen and will leap at the Blithers millions if he gets the chance. I sometimes feel sorry for the poor wretches." There was more scorn than pity in the way she said it, however, and her velvety eyes were suddenly hard and uncompromising.

He longed to defend himself, in the third person, but could not do so for very strong and obvious reasons. He allowed himself the privilege, however, of declaring that foreign noblemen are not always as black as they are painted. And then, for a very excellent reason, he contrived to change the subject by asking where she was going on the continent.

"I may go to Vienna," she said, with a smile that served to puzzle rather than to delight him. He was

more than ever convinced that she was playing with him. "But pray do not look so gloomy, Mr. Schmidt, I shall not make any demands upon your time while I am there. You may —"

"I am quite sure of that," he interrupted, with his ready smile. "You see, I am a person of no consequence in Vienna, while you — Ah, well, as an American girl you will be hobnobbing with the nobility while the humble Schmidt sits afar off and marvels at the kindness of a fate that befell him in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and yet curses the fate that makes him unworthy of the slightest notice from the aforesaid American girl. For, I daresay, Miss Guile, you, like all American girls, are ready to leap at titles."

"That really isn't fair, Mr. Schmidt," she protested, flushing. "Why should you and I quarrel over a condition that cannot apply to either of us? You are not a nobleman, and I am not a title-seeking American girl. So, why all this beautiful irony?"

"It only remains for me to humbly beg your pardon and to add that if you come to Vienna my every waking hour shall be devoted to the pleasure of —"

"I am sorry I mentioned it, Mr. Schmidt," she interrupted coldly. "You may rest easy, for I shall not keep you awake for a single hour. Besides, I may not go to Vienna at all."

"I am sure you would like Vienna," he said, somewhat chilled by her manner.

"I have been there, with my parents, but it was

a long time ago. I once saw the Emperor and often have I seen the wonderful Prince Lichtenstein."

"Have you travelled extensively in Europe?"

She was smiling once more. "I don't know what you would consider extensively," she said. "I was educated in Paris, I have spent innumerable winters in Rome and quite as many summers in Scotland, England, Switzerland, Germ—"

"I know who you are!" he cried out enthusiastically. To his amazement, a startled expression leaped into her eyes. "You are travelling under an assumed name." She remained perfectly still, watching him with an anxious smile on her lips. "You are no other than Miss Baedeker, the well-known authoress."

It seemed to him that she breathed deeply. At any rate, her brow cleared and her smile was positively enchanting. Never, in all his life, had he gazed upon a lovelier face. His heart began to beat with a rapidity that startled him, and a queer little sensation, as of smothering, made it difficult for him to speak naturally in his next attempt.

"In that case, my pseudonym should be Guide, not Guile," she cried merrily. The dimples played in her cheeks and her eyes were dancing.

"B. stands for Baedeker, I'm sure. Baedeker Guide. If the B. isn't for Baedeker, what is it for?"

"Are you asking what the B. really stands for, Mr. Schmidt?"

"In a round-about way, Miss Guile," he admitted.

"My name is Bedelia," she said, with absolute sincerity. "Me mither is Irish, d'ye see?"

"By jove, it's worth a lot of trouble to get you to smile like that," he cried admiringly. "It is the first really honest smile you've displayed. If you knew how it improves you, you'd be doing it all of the time."

"Smiles are sometimes expensive."

"It depends on the market."

"I never take them to a cheap market. They are not classed as necessities."

"You couldn't offer them to any one who loves luxuries more than I do."

"You pay for them only with compliments, I see, and there is nothing so cheap."

"Am I to take that as a rebuke?"

"If possible," she said sweetly.

At this juncture, the miserable Hobbs hove into sight, not figuratively but literally. He came surging across the deck in a mad dash from one haven to another, or, more accurately, from post to post.

"I beg pardon, sir," he gasped, finally steadying himself on wide-spread legs within easy reach of Robin's sustaining person. "There is a wireless for Mr. Totten, sir, but when I took it to 'im he said to fetch it to you, being unable to hold up 'is head, wot with the wretched meal he had yesterday and the —"

"I see, Hobbs. Well, where is it?"

Hobbs looked embarrassed. "Well, you see, sir, I

esitated about giving it to you when you appear to be so —"

"Never mind. You may give it to me. Miss Guile will surely pardon me if I devote a second or two to an occupation she followed so earnestly up to a very short time ago."

"Pray forget that I am present, Mr. Schmidt," she said, and smiled upon the bewildered Hobbs, who after an instant delivered the message to his master.

Robin read it through and at the end whistled softly.

"Take it to Mr. Totten, Hobbs, and see if it will not serve to make him hold up his head a little."

"Very good, sir. I hope it will. Wouldn't it be wise for me to hannounce who it is from, sir, to sort of prepare him for —"

"He knows who it is from, Hobbs, so you needn't worry. It is from home, if it will interest you, Hobbs."

"Thank you, sir, it does interest me. I thought it might be from Mr. Blithers."

Robin's scowl sent him scuttling away a great deal more rigidly than when he came.

"Idiot!" muttered the young man, still scowling.

There was silence between the two for a few seconds. Then she spoke disinterestedly:

"Is it from the Mr. Blithers who has the millions and the daughter who wants to marry a prince?"

"Merely a business transaction, Miss Guile," he said absently. He was thinking of Romano's message.

"So it would appear."

"I beg pardon? I was — er — thinking —"

"It was of no consequence, Mr. Schmidt," she said airily.

He picked up the thread once more. "As a matter of fact, I've heard it said that Miss Blithers refused to marry the Prince."

"Is it possible?" with fine irony. "Is he such a dreadful person as all that?"

"I'm sure I don't know," murmured Robin uncomfortably. "He may be no more dreadful than she."

"I cannot hear you, Mr. Schmidt," she persisted, with unmistakeable malice in her lovely eyes.

"I'm rather glad that you didn't," he confessed. "Silly remark, you know."

"Well, I hope she doesn't marry him," said Miss Guile.

"So do I," said R. Schmidt, and their eyes met. After a moment, she looked away, her first surrender to the mysterious something that lay deep in his.

"It would prove that all American girls are not so black as they're painted, wouldn't it?" she said, striving to regain the ground she had lost by that momentary lapse.

"Pray do not overlook the fact that I am half American," he said. "You must not expect me to say that they paint at all."

"Schmidt is a fine old American name," she mused, the mischief back in her eyes.

"And so is Bedelia," said he.

"Will you pardon me, Mr. Schmidt, if I express

surprise that you speak English without the tiniest suggestion of an accent?"

"I will pardon you for everything and anything, Miss Guile," said he, quite too distinctly. She drew back in her chair and the light of raillery died in her eyes.

"What an imperial sound it has!"

"And why not? The R stands for Rex."

"Ah, that accounts for the King's English!"

"Certainly," he grinned. "The king can do no wrong, don't you see?"

"Your servant who was here speaks nothing but the King's English, I perceive. Perhaps that accounts for a great deal."

"Hobbs? I mean to say, 'Obbs? I confess that he has taught me many tricks of the tongue. He is one of the crown jewels."

Suddenly, and without reason, she appeared to be bored. As a matter of fact, she hid an incipient yawn behind her small gloved hand.

"I think I shall go to my room. Will you kindly unwrap me, Mr. Schmidt?"

He promptly obeyed, and then assisted her to her feet, steadying her against the roll of the vessel.

"I shall pray for continuous rough weather," he announced, with as gallant a bow as could be made under the circumstances.

"Thank you," she said, and he was pleased to take it that she was not thanking him for a physical service.

A few minutes later he was in his own room, and

she was in hers, and the promenade deck was as barren as the desert of Sahara.

He found Count Quinnox stretched out upon his bed, attended not only by Hobbs but also the reanimated Dank. The crumpled message lay on the floor.

"I'm glad you waited awhile," said the young lieutenant, getting up from the trunk on which he had been sitting. "If you had come any sooner you would have heard words fit only for a soldier to hear. It really was quite appalling."

"He's better now," said Hobbs, more respectfully than was his wont. It was evident that he had sustained quite a shock.

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded the Prince, pointing to the message.

"Of all the confounded inpudence —" began the Count healthily, and then uttered a mighty groan of impotence. It was clear that he could not do justice to the occasion a second time.

Robin picked up the Marconigram, and calmly smoothed out the crinkles. Then he read it aloud, very slowly and with extreme disgust in his fine young face. It was a lengthy communication from Baron Romano, the Prime Minister in Edelweiss.

"'Preliminary agreement signed before hearing Blithers had bought London, Paris, Berlin. He cables his immediate visit to G. Object now appears clear. All newspapers in Europe print despatches from America that marriage is practically arranged be-

tween R. and M. Interviews with Blithers corroborate reported engagement. Europe is amused. Editorials sarcastic. Price on our securities advance two points on confirmation of report. We are bewildered. Also vague rumour they have eloped, but denied by B. Dawsbergen silent. What does it all mean? Wire truth to me. People are uneasy. Gourou will meet you in Paris.'"

In the adjoining suite, Miss Guile was shaking Mrs. Gaston out of a long-courted and much needed sleep. The poor lady sat up and blinked feebly at the excited, starry-eyed girl.

"Wake up!" cried Bedelia impatiently. "What do you think? I have a perfectly wonderful suspicion — perfectly wonderful."

"How can you be so unfeeling?" moaned the limp lady.

"This R. Schmidt is Prince Robin of Graustark!" cried the girl excitedly. "I am sure of it — just as sure as can be."

Mrs. Gaston's eyes were popping, not with amazement but alarm.

"Do lie down, child," she whimpered. "Marie! The sleeping powders at once! Do —"

"Oh, I'm not mad," cried the girl. "Now listen to me and I'll tell you why I believe — yes, actually believe him to be the —"

"Marie, do you hear me?"

Miss Guile shook her vigorously. "Wake up! It isn't a nightmare. Now listen!"

CHAPTER XI

THE LIEUTENANT RECEIVES ORDERS

THE next day brought not only an agreeable change in the weather but a most surprising alteration in the manner of Mrs. Gaston, whose attitude toward R. Schmidt and his friends had been anything but amicable up to the hour of Miss Guile's discovery. The excellent lady, recovering very quickly from her indisposition became positively polite to the hitherto repugnant Mr. Schmidt. She melted so abruptly and so completely that the young man was vaguely troubled. He began to wonder if his incognito had been pierced, so to speak.

It was not reasonable to suppose that Miss Guile was personally responsible for this startling transition from the inimical to the gracious on the part of her companion; the indifference of Miss Guile herself was sufficient proof to the contrary. Therefore, when Mrs. Gaston nosed him out shortly after breakfast and began to talk about the beautiful day in a manner so thoroughly respectful that it savoured of servility, he was taken-aback, flabbergasted. She seemed to be on the point of dropping her knee every time she spoke to him, and there was an unmistakable tremor of excitement in her voice even when she confided to him that she adored the ocean when it was calm. He

forbore asking when Miss Guile might be expected to appear on deck for her constitutional but she volunteered the information, which was neither vague nor yet definite. In fact, she said that Miss Guile would be up soon, and soon is a word that has a double meaning when applied to the movements of capricious womanhood. It may mean ten minutes and it may mean an hour and a half.

Mrs. Gaston's severely critical eyes were no longer severe, albeit they were critical. She took him in from head to foot with the eye of an appraiser, and the more she took him in the more she melted, until at last in order to keep from completely dissolving, she said good-bye to him and hurried off to find Miss Guile.

Now it is necessary to relate that Miss Guile had been particularly firm in her commands to Mrs. Gaston. She literally had stood the excellent lady up in a corner and lectured her for an hour on the wisdom of silence. In the first place, Mrs. Gaston was given to understand that she was not to breathe it to a soul that R. Schmidt was not R. Schmidt, and she was not to betray to him by word or sign that he was suspected of being the Prince of Graustark. Moreover, the exacting Miss Guile laid great stress upon another command: R. Schmidt was never to know that she was *not* Miss Guile, but some one else altogether.

"You're right, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Gaston in an excited whisper as she burst in upon her fair

companion, who was having coffee and toast in her parlour. The more or less resuscitated Marie was waiting to do up her mistress's hair, and the young lady herself was alluringly charming in spite of the fact that it was not already "done up." "He is the — er — he is just what you think."

"Good heavens, you haven't gone and done it, have you," cried the girl, a slim hand halting with a piece of toast half way to her lips.

"Gone and done it?"

"You haven't been blabbing, have you?"

"How can you say that to me? Am I not to be trusted? Am I so weak and —"

"Don't cry, you old dear! Forgive me. But now tell me — absolutely — just what you've been up to. Don't mind Marie. She is French. She can always hold her tongue."

"Well, I've been talking with him, that's all. I'm sure he is the Prince. No ordinary male could be as sweet and agreeable and sunny as —"

"Stop!" cried Miss Guile, with a pretty moue, putting the tips of her fingers to her ears after putting the piece of toast into her mouth. "One would think you were a sentimental old maid instead of a cold-blooded, experienced, man-hating married woman."

"You forget that I am a widow, my dear. Besides, it is disgusting for one to speak with one's mouth full of buttered toast. It —"

"Oh, how I used to loathe you when you kept for-

ever ding-donging at me about the way I ate when I was almost starving. Were you never a hungry little kid? Did you never lick jam and honey off your fingers and —"

"Many and many a time," confessed Mrs. Gaston, beaming once more and laying a gentle, loving hand on the girl's shoulder. Miss Guile dropped her head over until her cheek rested on the caressing hand, and munched toast with blissful abandon.

"Now tell me what you've been up to," she said, and Mrs. Gaston repeated every word of the conversation she had had with R. Schmidt, proving absolutely nothing but stoutly maintaining that her intuition was completely to be depended upon.

"And, oh," she whispered in conclusion, "wouldn't it be perfectly wonderful if you two should fall in love with each other —"

"Don't be silly!"

"But you have said that if he should fall in love with you for yourself and not because —"

"I have also said that I will not marry any man, prince, duke, king, count or anything else unless I am in love with him. Don't overlook that, please."

"But he is really very nice. I should think you *could* fall in love with him. Just think how it would please your father and mother. Just think —"

"I won't be bullied!"

"Am I bullying you?" in amazement.

"No; but father tries to bully me, and you know it."

"You must admit that the — this Mr. Schmidt is handsome, charming, bright —"

"I admit nothing," said Miss Guile resolutely, and ordered Marie to dress her hair as carefully as possible. "Take as long as you like, Marie. I shall not go on deck for hours."

"I — I told him you would be up soon," stammered the poor, man-hating ex-governess.

"You did?" said Miss Guile, with what was supposed to be a deadly look in her eyes.

"Well, he enquired," said the other.

"Anything else?" domineered the beauty.

"I forgot to mention one thing. He *did* ask me if your name was really Bedelia."

"And what did you tell him?" cried the girl, in sudden agitation.

"I managed to tell him that it was," said Mrs. Gaston stiffly.

"Good!" cried Miss Guile, vastly relieved, and not at all troubled over the blight that had been put upon a very worthy lady's conscience.

When she appeared on deck long afterward, she found every chair occupied. A warm sun, a far from turbulent sea, and a refreshing breeze had brought about a marvellous transformation. Every one was happy, every one had come back from the grave to gloat over the grim reaper's failure to do his worst, although in certain cases he had been importuned to do it without hesitation.

She made several brisk rounds of the deck: then,

feeling that people were following her with their eyes, — admiringly, to be sure, but what of that? — she abandoned the pleasant exercise and sought the seclusion of the sunless corner where her chair was stationed. The ship's daily newspaper was just off the press and many of the loungers were reading the brief telegraphic news from the capitals of the world.

During her stroll she passed several groups of men and women who were lightly, even scornfully employed in discussing an article of news which had to do with Mr. Blithers and the Prince of Graustark. Filled with an acute curiosity, she procured a copy of the paper from a steward, and was glancing at the head lines as she made her way into her corner. Double-leaded type appeared over the rumoured engagment of Miss Maud Applegate Blithers, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the great capitalist, and Robin, Prince of Graustark. A queer little smile played about her lips as she folded the paper for future perusal. Turning the corner of the deck-building she almost collided with R. Schmidt, who stood leaning against the wall, scanning the little newspaper with eyes that were blind to everything else.

"Oh!" she gasped.

"I'm sorry," he exclaimed, crumpling the paper in his hand as he backed away, flushing. "Stupid of me. Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Schmidt. It wasn't your fault. I should have looked where I was going.

'Stop, look and listen,' as they say at the railway crossing."

"'Danger' is one of the commonest signs, Miss Guile. It lurks everywhere, especially around corners. I see you have a paper. It appears that Miss Blithers and the Prince are to be married after all."

"Yes; it is quite apparent that the Blithers family intends to have a title at any cost," she said, and her eyes flashed.

"Would you like to take a few turns, Miss Guile?" he inquired, a trace of nervousness in his manner. "I think I can take you safely over the hurdles and around the bunkers." He indicated the outstretched legs along the promenade deck and the immovable groups of chatterers along the rail.

Before deciding, she shot an investigating glance into the corner. Mrs. Gaston was not only there but was engaged in conversation with the grey-moustached gentleman in a near-by chair. It required but half a glance to show that Mr. Totten was unmistakably interested in something the voluble lady had just said to him.

"No, thank you, Mr. Schmidt," said Miss Guile hastily, and then hurried over to her chair, a distinct cloud on her smooth brow. Robin, considering himself dismissed, whirled and went his way, a dark flush spreading over his face. Never, in all his life, had he been quite so out of patience with the world as on this bright, sunny morning.

Miss Guile's frown deepened when her abrupt appearance at Mrs. Gaston's side caused that lady to look up with a guilty start and to break off in the middle of a sentence that had begun with: "International marriages, as a rule, are — Oh!"

Mr. Totten arose and bowed with courtly grace to the new arrival on the scene. He appeared to be immensely relieved.

"A lovely morning, Miss Guile," he said as he stooped to arrange her rug. "I hear that you were not at all disturbed by yesterday's blow."

"I was just telling Mr. Totten that you are a wonderful sailor," said Mrs. Gaston, a note of appeal in her voice. "He says his friend, Mr. Schmidt, is also a good sailor. Isn't it perfectly wonderful?"

"I can't see anything wonderful about it," said Miss Guile, fixing the ex-governess with a look that seared.

"We were speaking of this rumoured engagement of the Prince of Graustark and — er — what's the name?" He glanced at his newspaper. "Miss Blithers, of course. I enquired of Mrs.— er — Gaston if she happens to know the young lady. She remembers seeing her frequently as a very small child."

"In Paris," said Mrs. Gaston. "One couldn't very well help seeing her, you know. She was the only child of the great Mr. Blithers, whose name was on every one's lips at the —"

Miss Guile interrupted. "It would be like the

great Mr. Blithers to buy this toy prince for his daughter — as a family plaything or human lap-dog, or something of the sort, wouldn't it?"

Mr. Totten betrayed no emotion save amusement. Miss Guile was watching through half-closed eyes. There was a noticeable stiffening of the prim figure of Mrs. Gaston.

"I've no doubt Mr. Blithers can afford to buy the most expensive of toys for his only child. You Americans go in for the luxuries of life. What could be more extravagant than the purchase of a royal lap-dog? The only drawback I can suggest is that the Prince might turn out to be a cur, and then where would Mr. Blithers be?"

"It is more to the point to ask where Miss Blithers would be, Mr. Totten," said Miss Guile, with a smile that caused the fierce old warrior to afterwards declare to Dank that he never had seen a lovelier girl in all his life.

"Ah, but we spoke of the Prince as a lap-dog or a cur, Miss Guile, not as a watch-dog," said he.

"I see," said Miss Guile, after a moment. "He wouldn't sleep with one eye open. I see."

"The lap of luxury is an enviable resting-place. I know of no prince who would despise it."

"But a wife is sometimes a thing to be despised," said she.

"Quite true," said Mr. Totten. "I've no doubt that the Prince of Graustark will despise his wife, and for that reason will be quite content to close both eyes

and let her go on searching for her heart's desire."

"She would be his Princess. Could he afford to allow his love of luxury to go as far as that?"

"Quite as justifiably, I should say, as Mr. Blithers when he delivers his only child into — into bondage."

"You were about to use another term."

"I was, but I thought in time, Miss Guile."

R. Schmidt sauntered briskly past at this juncture, looking neither to the right nor left. They watched him until he disappeared down the deck.

"I think Mr. Schmidt is a perfectly delightful young man," said Mrs. Gaston, simply because she couldn't help it.

"You really think he will marry Miss Blithers, Mr. Totten?" ventured Miss Guile.

"He? Oh, I see — the Prince?" Mr. Totten came near to being no diplomat. "How should I know, Miss Guile?"

"Of course! How *should* you know?" she cried.

Mr. Totten found something to interest him in the printed sheet and proceeded to read it with considerable avidity. Miss Guile smiled to herself and purposely avoided the shocked look in Mrs. Gaston's eyes.

"Bouillon at last," cried the agitated duenna, and peremptorily summoned one of the tray-bearing stewards. "I am famished."

Evidently Mr. Totten did not care for his mid-morning refreshment, for, with the most courtly of smiles, he arose and left them to their bouillon.

"Here comes Mr. Schmidt," whispered Mrs. Gaston

excitedly, a few moments later, and at once made a movement indicative of hasty departure.

"Sit still," said Miss Guile peremptorily.

R. Schmidt again passed them by without so much as a glance in their direction. There was a very sweet smile on Miss Guile's lips as she closed her eyes and lay back in her chair. Once, twice, thrice, even as many as six times R. Schmidt strode rapidly by their corner, his head high and his face aglow.

At last a queer little pucker appeared on the serene brow of the far from drowsy young lady whose eyes peeped through half closed lids. Suddenly she threw off her rug and with a brief remark to her companion arose and went to her cabin. Mrs. Gaston followed, not from choice but because the brief remark was in the form of a command.

Soon afterward, R. Schmidt who had been joined by Dank, threw himself into his chair with a great sigh of fatigue and said:

"'Gad, I've walked a hundred miles since breakfast. Have you a match?"

"Hobbs has made a very curious discovery," said the young lieutenant, producing his match-box. There was a perturbed look in his eyes.

"If Hobbs isn't careful he'll discover a new continent one of these days. He is always discovering something," said Robin, puffing away at his pipe.

"But this is really interesting. It seems that he was in the hold when Miss Guile's maid came down to get into one of her mistress's trunks. Now, the first

letter in Guile is G, isn't it? Well, Hobbs says there are at least half-a-dozen trunks there belonging to the young lady and that all of them are marked with a large red B. What do you make of it?"

The Prince had stopped puffing at his pipe.

"Hobbs may be mistaken in the maid, Dank. It is likely that they are not Miss Guile's trunks, at all."

"He appears to be absolutely sure of his ground. He heard the maid mention Miss Guile's name when she directed the men to get one of the trunks out of the pile. That's what attracted his attention. He confided to me that you are interested in the young lady, and therefore it was quite natural for him to be similarly affected. 'Like master, like man,' d'ye see?"

"Really, you know, Dank, I ought to dismiss Hobbs," said Robin irritably. "He is getting to be a dreadful nuisance. Always nosing around, trying to —"

"But after all, sir, you'll have to admit that he has made a puzzling discovery. Why should her luggage be marked with a B?"

"I should say because her name begins with a B," said Robin shortly.

"In that case, it isn't Guile."

"Obviously." The young man was thinking very hard.

"And if it isn't Guile, there must be an excellent reason for her sailing under a false name. She doesn't look like an adventuress."

R. Schmidt rewarded this remark with a cold stare.

"Would you mind telling me what she does look like, Dank?" he enquired severely.

The lieutenant flushed. "I have not had the same opportunity for observation that you've enjoyed, sir, but I should say, off-hand, that she looks like a very dangerous young person."

"Do you mean to imply that she is — er — not altogether what one would call right?"

Dank grinned. "Don't you regard her as rather perilously beautiful?"

"Oh, I see. That's what you mean. I suppose you got *that* from Hobbs, too."

"Not at all. I have an excellent pair of eyes."

"What are you trying to get at, Dank?" demanded Robin abruptly.

"I'm trying to get to the bottom of Miss Guile's guile, if it please your royal highness," said the lieutenant coolly. "It is hard to connect the B and the G, you know."

"But why should we deny her a privilege that we are enjoying, all three of us? Are we not in the same boat?"

"Literally and figuratively. That explains nothing, however."

"Have you a theory?"

"There are many that we could advance, but, of course, only one of them could be the right one, even if we were acute enough to include it in our list of guesses. She may have an imperative reason for not

disclosing her identity. For instance, she may be running away to get married."

"That's possible," agreed Robin.

"But not probable. She may be a popular music-hall favourite, or one of those peculiarly clever creatures known as the American newspaper woman, against whom we have been warned. Don't you regard it as rather significant that of all the people on this ship she should be one to attach herself to the unrecognised Prince of Graustark? Put two and two together, sir, and —"

"I find it singularly difficult to put one and one together, Dank," said the Prince ruefully. "No; you are wrong in both of your guesses. I've encountered music-hall favourites and I can assure you she isn't one of them. And as for your statement that she attached herself to me, you were never so mistaken in your life. I give you my word, she doesn't care a hang whether I'm on the ship or clinging to a life preserver out there in the middle of the Atlantic. I have reason to know, Dank."

"So be it," said Dank, but with doubt in his eyes. "You ought to know. I've never spoken to her, so —"

"She thinks you are a dreadfully attractive chap, Dank," said Robin mischievously. "She said so only yesterday."

Dank gave his prince a disgusted look, and smoked on in silence. His dignity was ruffled.

"Her Christian name is Bedelia," ventured Robin, after a pause.

"That doesn't get us anywhere," said Dank sourly.

"And her mother is Irish."

"Which accounts for those wonderful Irish blue eyes that —"

"So you've noticed them, eh?"

"Naturally."

"I consider them a very dark grey."

"I think we'd better get back to the luggage," said Dank hastily. "Hobbs thinks that she —"

"Oh, Lord, Dank, don't tell me what Hobbs thinks," growled Robin. "Let her make use of all the letters in the alphabet if it pleases her. What is it to us? Moreover, she may be utilising a lot of borrowed trunks, who knows? Or B may have been her initial before she was divorced and —"

"Divorced?"

"— her maiden name restored," concluded Robin airily. "Simple deduction, Dank. Don't bother your head about her any longer. What we know isn't going to hurt us, and what we don't know isn't —"

"Has it occurred to you that Russia may have set spies upon you —"

"Nonsense!"

"It isn't as preposterous as you —"

"Come, old fellow, let's forget Miss Guile," cried Robin, slapping the lieutenant on the shoulder. "Let's think of the real peril,— Maud Applegate

Blithers." He held up the ship's paper for Dank to see and then sat back to enjoy his companion's rage.

An hour later Dank and Count Quinnox might have been seen seated side by side on the edge of a skylight at the tip-top of the ship's structure, engaged in the closest conversation. There was a troubled look in the old man's eyes and the light of adventure in those of his junior. The sum and substance of their discussion may be given in a brief sentence: Something would have to be done to prevent Robin from falling in love with the fascinating Miss Guile.

"He is young enough and stubborn enough to make a fool of himself over her," the Count had said. "I wouldn't blame him, 'pon my soul I wouldn't. She is very attractive — ahem! You must be his safeguard, Dank. Go in and do as I suggest. You are a good looking chap and you've nothing to lose. So far as she is concerned, you are quite as well worth while as the fellow known as R. Schmidt. There's no reason why you shouldn't make the remainder of the passage pleasant for her, and at the same time enjoy yourself at nobody's expense."

"They know by instinct, confound 'em," lamented Dank; "they know the real article, and you can't fool 'em. She knows that he is the high muck-a-muck in this party and she won't even look at me, you take my word for it."

"At any rate, you can try, can't you?" said the Count impatiently.

"Is it a command, sir?"

"It is."

"Very well, sir. I shall do my best."

"We can't afford to have him losing his head over a pretty — er — a nobody, perhaps an adventuress, — at this stage of the game. I much prefer the impossible Miss Blithers, Dank, to this captivating unknown. At least we know who and what she is, and what she represents. But we owe it to our country and to Dawsbergen to see that he doesn't do anything — er — foolish. We have five days left of this voyage, Dank. They may be fatal days for him, if you do not come to the rescue."

"They may be fatal days for me," said Dank, looking out over the ocean.

CHAPTER XII

THE LIEUTENANT REPORTS

Five days later as the *Jupiter* was discharging passengers at Plymouth, Count Quinnox and Lieutenant Dank stood well forward on the promenade deck watching the operations. The younger man was moody and distrait, an unusual condition for him but one that had been noticeably recurrent during the past two or three days. He pulled at his smart little moustache and looked out upon the world through singularly lack-lustre eyes. Something had gone wrong with him, and it was something that he felt in duty bound to lay before his superior, the grim old Minister of War and hereditary chief of the Castle Guard. Occasionally his sombre gaze shifted to a spot farther down the deck, where a young man and woman leaned upon the rail and surveyed the scene of activity below.

"What is on your mind, Dank?" asked the Count abruptly. "Out with it."

Dank started. "It's true, then? I *do* look as much of a fool as I feel, eh?" There was bitterness in his usually cheery voice.

"Feel like a fool, eh?" growled the old soldier.

"Pretty mess I've made of the business," lamented Dank surlily. "Putting myself up as a contender

against a fellow like Robin, and dreaming that I could win out, even for a minute! Good Lord, what an ass I am! Why we've only made it worse, Count. We've touched him with the spur of rivalry, and what could be more calamitous than that? From being a rather matter-of-fact, indifferent observer, he becomes a bewildering cavalier bent on conquest at any cost. I am swept aside as if I were a parcel of rags. For two days I stood between him and the incomparable Miss Guile. Then he suddenly arouses himself. My cake is dough. I am nobody. My feet get cold, as they say in America,— although I don't know why they say it. What has the temperature of one's feet to do with it? See! There they are. They are constantly together, walking, sitting, standing, eating, drinking, reading — *Eh bien!* You have seen with your own eyes. The beautiful Miss Guile has bewitched our Prince, and my labour is not only lost but I myself am lost. *Mon dieu!*"

The Count stared at him in perplexity for a moment. Then a look of surprise came into his eyes,— surprise not unmingled with scorn.

"You don't mean to say, Dank, that you've fallen in love with her? Oh, you absurd fledgelings. Will you —"

"Forgive my insolence, Count, but it is forty years since you were a fledgeling. You don't see things as you saw them forty years ago. Permit me to remind you that you are a grandfather."

"Your point is well taken, my lad," said the Count,

with a twinkle in his eye. "You can't help being young any more than I can help being old. Youth is perennial, old age a winding-sheet. I am to take it, then, that you've lost your heart to the fair —"

"Why not?" broke in Dank fiercely. "Why should it appear incredible to you? Is she not the most entrancing creature in all the world? Is she not the most appealing, the most adorable, the most feminine of all her sex? Is it possible that one can be so old that it is impossible for him to feel the charm, the loveliness, the —"

"For heaven's sake, Dank," said the old man in alarm, "don't gesticulate so wildly. People will think we are quarrelling. Calm yourself, my boy."

"You set a task for me and I obey. You urge me to do my duty by Graustark. You tell me I am a handsome dog and irresistible. She will be overwhelmed by my manly beauty, my valour, my soldierly bearing,— so say you! And what is the outcome? I — I, the vain-glorious,— I am wrapped around her little finger so tightly that all the king's horses and all the king's men —"

"Halt!" commanded his general softly. "You are turning tail like the veriest coward. Right about, face! Would you surrender to a slip of a girl whose only weapons are a pair of innocent blue eyes and a roguish smile? Be a man! Stand by your guns. Outwardly you are the equal of R. Schmidt, whose sole —"

"That sounds very well, sir, but how can I take up

arms against my Prince? He stands by *his* guns — as you may see, sir,— and, dammit all, I'm no traitor. I've just got to stand by 'em with him. That rot about all being fair in love and war is the silliest — Oh, well, there's no use whining about it. I'm mad about her, and so is he. You can't —"

The Count stopped him with a sharp gesture. A look of real concern appeared in his eyes.

"Do you believe that he is actually in love with this girl?"

"Heels over head," barked the unhappy lieutenant. "I've never seen a worse case."

"This is serious — more serious than I thought."

"It's horrible," declared Dank, but not thinking of the situation from the Count's point of view.

"We do not know who or what she is. She may be —"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but we do know what she is," said the other firmly. "You will not pretend to say that she is not a gentlewoman. She is cultured, refined —"

"I grant all of that," said the Count. "I am not blind, Dank. But it seems fairly certain that her name is not Guile. We —"

"Nor is his name Schmidt. That's no argument, sir."

"Still we cannot take the chance, my lad. We must put an end to this fond adventure. Robin is our most precious possession. We must not — Why do you shake your head?"

"We are powerless, sir. If he makes up his mind to marry Miss Guile, he'll do it in spite of anything we can do. That is, provided she is of the same mind."

"God defend us, I fear you are right," groaned the old Count. "He has declared himself a hundred times, and he is a wilful lad. I recall the uselessness of the opposition that was set up against his lamented mother when she decided to marry Grenfell Lorry. 'Gad, sir, it was like butting into a stone wall. She said she *would* and she did. I fear me that Robin has much of his mother in him."

"Behold in me the first sacrifice," declaimed Dank, lifting his eyes heavenward.

"Oh, you will recover," was the unsympathetic rejoinder. "It is for him that I fear, not for you."

"Recover, sir?" in despair. "I fear you misjudge my humble heart —"

"Bosh! Your heart has been through a dozen accidents of this character, Dank, and it is good for a hundred more. I'll rejoice when this voyage is ended and we have him safe on his way to Edelweiss."

"That will not make the slightest difference, sir. If he sets his head to marry her he'll do it if we take him to the North Pole. All Graustark can't stop him, — nor old man Blithers either. Besides, he says he isn't going to Edelweiss immediately."

"That is news to me."

"I thought it would be. He came to the decision

not more than two hours ago. He is determined to spend a couple of weeks at Interlaken."

"Interlaken?"

"Yes. Miss Guile expects to stop there for a fortnight after leaving Paris."

"I must remonstrate with Robin — at once," declared the old man. "He is needed in Graustark. He must be made to realise the importance of —"

"And what are you going to do if he declines to realise anything but the importance of a fortnight in the shadow of the Jungfrau?"

"God help me, I don't know, Dank." The Count's brow was moist, and he looked anything but an unconquerable soldier.

"I told him we were expected to reach home by the end of next week, and he said that a quiet fortnight in the Alps would make new men of all of us."

"Do you mean to say he expects me to dawdle —"

"More than that, sir. He also expects me to dawdle too. I shall probably shoot myself before the two weeks are over."

"I have it! I shall take Mrs. Gaston into my confidence. It is the only hope, I fear. I shall tell her that he is —"

"No hope there," said Dank mournfully. "Haven't you noticed how keen she is to have them together all the time? She's as wily as a fox. Never misses a chance. Hasn't it occurred to you to wonder why she drags you off on the slightest pretext when

you happen to be in the way? She's done it a hundred times. Always leaving them alone together. My God, how I despise that woman! Not once but twenty times a day she finds an excuse to interfere when I am trying to get in a few words with Miss Guile. She's forever wanting me to show her the engine-room or the Captain's bridge or the wireless office or — why, by jove, sir, it was only yesterday that she asked me to come and look at the waves. Said she'd found a splendid place to see them from, just as if the whole damned Atlantic wasn't full of 'em. And isn't she always looking for porpoises on the opposite side of the ship? And how many whales and ice-bergs do you think she's been trying to find in the last five days? No, sir! There's no hope there!"

"'Pon my soul!" was all that the poor Minister of War, an adept in strategy, was able to exclaim.

The *Jupiter* disgorged most of her passengers at Cherbourg and the descent upon Paris had scarcely begun when the good ship steamed away for Antwerp, Bremen and Hamburg. She was one of the older vessels in the vast fleet of ships controlled by the American All-Seas and All-Ports Company, and she called wherever there was a port open to trans-Atlantic navigation. She was a single factor in the great monopoly described as the "Billion Dollar Boast." The United States had been slow to recognise the profits of seas that were free, but when she did wake up she proceeded to act as if she owned them and all that therein lay. Her people spoke of the Gulf Stream as "ours";

of the Banks of Newfoundland as "ours"—or in some instances as "ourn"; of Liverpool, Hamburg, London, Bremen and other such places as "our European terminals"; and of the various oceans, seas and navigable waters as "a part of the system." Where once the Stars and Stripes were as rare as hummingbirds in Baffin's Bay, the flags were now so thick that they resembled Fourth of July decorations on Fifth avenue, and it was almost impossible to cross the Atlantic without dodging a hundred vessels on which Dixie was being played, coming and going. A man from New Hampshire declared, after one of his trips over and back, that he cheered the good old tune so incessantly that his voice failed on the third day out, both ways, and he had to voice his patriotism with a tin horn.

Ships of the All-Seas and All-Ports Company fairly stuffed the harbours of the world. America was awake at last — wide awake! — and the necessity for prodding her was now limited to the task of putting her to sleep long enough to allow other nations a chance to scrape together enough able bodied seamen to man the ships.

William W. Blithers was one of the directors of the All-Seas and All-Ports Company. He was the first American to awake.

For some unaccountable reason Miss Guile and her companion preferred to travel alone to Paris. They had a private compartment, over which a respectful but adamantine conductor exercised an authority that

irritated R. Schmidt beyond expression. The rest of the train was crowded to its capacity, and here was desirable space going to waste in the section occupied by the selfish Miss Guile. He couldn't understand it in her. Was it, after all, to be put down as a simple steamer encounter? Was she deliberately snubbing him, now that they were on land? Was he, a prince of the royal blood, to be tossed aside by this purse-proud American as if he were the simplest of simpletons? And what did she mean by stationing an officious hireling before her door to order him away when he undertook to pay her a friendly visit? — to offer his own and Hobbs' services in case they were needed in Paris. Why should she lock her confounded door anyway,— and draw the curtains? There were other whys too numerous to mention, and there wasn't an answer to a single one of them. The whole proceeding was incomprehensible.

To begin with, she certainly made no effort to conceal the fact that she was trying to avoid him from the instant the tender drew alongside to take off the passengers. As a matter of fact, she seemed to be making a point of it. And yet, the evening before, she had appeared rather enchanted with the prospect of seeing him at Interlaken.

It was not until the boat-train was nearing the environs of Paris that Hobbs threw some light over the situation, with the result that it instantly became darker than ever before. It appears that Miss Guile was met at the landing by a very good-looking young

man who not only escorted her to the train but actually entered it with her, and was even now enjoying the luxury of a private compartment as well as the contents of a large luncheon hamper, to say nothing of an uninterrupted view of something far more inspiring than the scenery.

"Frenchman?" inquired Dank listlessly.

"American, I should say, sir," said Hobbs, balancing himself in the corridor outside the door and sticking his head inside with more confidence than a traveller usually feels when travelling from Cherbourg to Paris. "But I wouldn't swear to it, sir. I didn't 'ear a word he said, being quite some distance away at the time. Happearances are deceptive, as I've said a great many times. A man may look like an American and still be almost anything else, see wot I mean? On the other hand, a man may look like almost nothing and still be American to his toes. I remember once saying to —"

"That's all right, Hobbs," broke in R. Schmidt sternly. "We also remember what you said, so don't repeat it. How soon do we get in?"

Hobbs cheerfully looked at his watch. "I couldn't say positive, sir, but I should think in about fourteen and a 'alf minutes, or maybe a shade under — between fourteen and fourteen and a 'alf, sir. As I was saying, he was a most intelligent looking chap, sir, and very 'andsome of face and figger. Between twenty-four and twenty-five, I dare say. Light haired, smooth-faced, quite tall and dressed in dark blue with

a cravat, sir, that looked like cerise but may have been —"

"For heaven's sake, Hobbs, let up!" cried Robin, throwing up his hands.

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir. Did I mention that he wears a straw 'at with a crimson band on it? Well, if I didn't, he does. Hincidentally, they seemed greatly pleased to see each other. He kissed her hand, and looked as though he might have gone even farther than that if it 'adn't been for the crowd —"

"That will do!" said Robin sharply, a sudden flush mounting to his cheek.

"Very good, sir. Shall I get the bags down for the porters, sir? I beg pardon, sir,—" to one of the three surly gentlemen who sat facing the travellers from Graustark,—"my fault entirely. I don't believe it is damaged, sir. Allow me to —"

"Thank you," growled the stranger. "I can put it on myself," and he jerked his hat out of Hobbs' hand and set it at a rather forbidding angle above a lowering brow. "Look what you're doing after this, will you?"

"Certainly, sir," said Hobbs agreeably. "It's almost impossible to see without eyes in the back of one's head, don't you know. I 'ope —"

"All right, *all* right!" snapped the man, glaring balefully. "And let me tell you something else, my man. Don't go about knocking Americans without first taking a look. Just bear that in mind, will you?"

"The surest way is to listen," began Hobbs loftily, but, catching a look from his royal master, desisted. He proceeded to get down the hand luggage.

At the Gare St. Lazare, Robin had a brief glimpse of Miss Guile as she hurried with the crowd down to the cab enclosure, where her escort, the alert young stranger, put her into a waiting limousine, bundled Mrs. Gaston and Marie in after her, and then dashed away, obviously to see their luggage through the *douane*.

She espied the tall figure of her fellow voyager near the steps and leaned forward to wave a perfunctory farewell to him. The car was creeping out toward the packed thoroughfare. It is possible that she expected him to dash among the chortling machines, at risk of life or limb, for a word or two at parting. If so, she was disappointed. He remained perfectly still, with uplifted hat, a faint smile on his lips and not the slightest sign of annoyance in his face. She smiled securely to herself as she leaned back in the seat, and was satisfied! Curiosity set its demand upon her an instant later, however, and she peered slyly through the little window in the back. He lifted his hat once more and she flushed to her throat as she quickly drew back into the corner. How in the world could he have seen her through that abominable slit in the limousine? And why was he now grinning so broadly?

Count Quinnox found him standing there a few minutes later, twirling his stick and smiling with his

eyes. Accompanying the old soldier was a slight, sharp-featured man with keen black eyes and a thin, pointed moustache of grey.

This man was Gourou, Chief of Police and Commander of the Tower in Edelweiss, successor to the celebrated Baron Dangloss. After he had greeted his prince, the quiet little man announced that he had reserved for him an apartment at the Bristol.

"I am instructed by the Prime Minister, your highness, to urge your immediate return to Edelweiss," he went on, lowering his voice. "The people are disturbed by the reports that have reached us during the past week or two, and Baron Romano is convinced that nothing will serve to subdue the feeling of uneasiness that prevails except your own declaration — in person — that these reports are untrue."

"I shall telegraph at once to Baron Romano that it is all poppy-cock," said Robin easily. "I refer, of course, to the reported engagement. I am not going to marry Miss Blithers and that's all there is to be said. You may see to it, baron, that a statement is issued to all of the Paris newspapers to-day, and to the correspondents for all the great papers in Europe and America. I have prepared this statement, under my own signature, and it is to be the last word in the matter. It is in my pocket at this instant. You shall have it when we reach the hotel — And that reminds me of another thing. I'm sorry that I shall have to ask you to countermand the reservation for rooms at the hotel you mention. I have already re-

served rooms at the Ritz,— by wireless. We shall stop there. Where is Dank? "

" The Ritz is hardly the place for —"

But Robin clapped him on the back and favoured him with the good-natured, boyish smile that mastered even the fiercest of his counsellors, and the Minister of Police, being an astute man, heaved a deep sigh of resignation.

" Dank is looking after the trunks, highness, and Hobbs is coming along with the hand luggage," he said. " The Ritz, you say? Then I shall have to instruct Lieutenant Dank to send the luggage there instead of to the Bristol. Pardon, your highness." He was off like a flash.

Count Quinnox was gnawing his moustache. " See here, Robin," he said, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, " you are in Paris now and not on board a ship at sea. Miss Guile is a beautiful, charming, highly estimable young woman, and, I might as well say it straight out to your face, you ought not to subject her to the notoriety that is bound to follow if the newspapers learn that she is playing around Paris, no matter how innocently, with a prince whom —"

" Just a moment, Count," interrupted Robin, a cold light in his now unsmiling eyes. " You are getting a little ahead of the game. Miss Guile is not going to the Ritz, nor do I expect her to play around Paris with me. As a matter of fact, she refused to tell me where she is to stop while here, and I am uncomfortably certain that I shall not see her unless by

chance. On the other hand, I may as well be perfectly frank with you and say it straight out to *your* face that I am going to try to find her if possible, but I am not mean enough to employ the methods common to such enterprises. I could have followed her car in another when she left here a few minutes ago; I could manage in a dozen ways to run her to earth, as the detectives do in the books, but I'd be ashamed to look her in the face if I did any of these things. I shall take a gentleman's chance, my dear Count, and trust to luck and the generosity of fate. You may be sure that I shall not annoy Miss Guile, and you may be equally sure that she —"

"I beg your pardon, Robin, but I did not employ the word annoy," protested the Count.

"— that she takes me for a gentleman if not for a prince," went on Robin, deliberately completing the sentence before he smiled his forgiveness upon the old man. "I selected the Ritz because all rich Americans go there, I'm told. I'm taking a chance."

Quinnox had an obstinate strain in his make-up. He continued: "There is another side to the case, my boy. As a gentleman, you cannot allow this lovely girl to — er — well, to fall in love with you. That would be cruel, wantonly cruel. And it is just the thing that is bound to happen if you go on with —"

"My dear Count, you forget that I am only R. Schmidt to her and but one of perhaps a hundred young men who have placed her in the same perilous position. Moreover, it's the other way 'round, sir.

It is I who take the risk, not Miss Guile. I regret to say, sir, that if there is to be any falling in love, I am the one who is most likely to fall, and to fall hard. You assume that Miss Guile is heart-whole and fancy free. 'Gad, I wish that I could be sure of it!" He spoke with such fervour that the Count was indeed dismayed.

"Robin, my lad, I beg of you to consider the consequences that —"

"There's no use discussing it, old friend. Trust to luck. There is a bully good chance that she will send me about my business when the time comes and then the salvation of Graustark will be assured." He said it lightly but there was a dark look in his eyes that belied the jaunty words.

"Am I to understand that you intend to — to ask her to marry you?" demanded the Count, profoundly troubled. "Remember, boy, that you are the Prince of Graustark, that you —"

"But I'm not going to ask her to marry the Prince of Graustark. I'm going to ask her to marry R. Schmidt," said Robin composedly.

"God defend us, Robin, I — I —"

"God has all he can do to defend us from William W. Blithers, Count. Don't ask too much of him. What kind of a nation are we if we can't get along without asking God to defend us every time we see trouble ahead? And do you suppose he is going to defend us against a slip of a girl —"

"Enough! Enough!" cried the Count, compressing his lips and glaring straight ahead.

"That's the way to talk," cried Robin enthusiastically. "By the way, I hope Dank is clever enough to find out who that young fellow is while they are clearing the luggage in there. I had a good look at him just now. He is all that Hobbs describes and a little more. He is a hustler."

CHAPTER XIII

THE RED LETTER B

In the Baron's room at the Ritz late that night there was held a secret conference. Two shadowy figures stole down the corridor at midnight and were admitted to the room, while Prince Robin slept soundly in his remote four-poster and dreamed of something that brought a gentle smile to his lips.

The three conspirators were of the same mind: it was clear that something must be done. But what? That was the question. Gourou declared that the people were very much disturbed over the trick the great capitalist had played upon the cabinet; there were sullen threats of a revolt if the government insisted on the deposit of bonds as required by the agreement. More than that, there were open declarations that the daughter of Mr. Blithers would never be permitted to occupy the throne of Graustark. Deeply as his subjects loved the young Prince, they would force him to abdicate rather than submit to the desecration of a throne that had never been dishonoured. They would accept William W. Blithers' money, but they would have none of William W. Blithers' daughter. That was more than could be expected of any self-respecting people! According to the Minister of Police, the name of Blithers was already a common synonym for affliction — and frequently employed in supposing a male-

diction. It signified all that was mean, treacherous, scurrilous. He was spoken of through clenched teeth as "the blood sucker." Children were ominously reproved by the threatening use of the word Blithers. "Blithers will get you if you don't wash your face," and all that sort of thing.

There was talk in some circles of demanding the resignation of the cabinet, but even the pessimistic Gourou admitted that it was idle talk and would come to nothing if the menacing shadow of Maud Applegate Blithers could be banished from the vicinity of the throne. Graustarkians would abide by the compact made by their leading men and would be content to regard Mr. Blithers as a bona fide creditor. They would pay him in full when the loan matured, even though they were compelled to sacrifice their houses in order to accomplish that end. But, like all the rest of the world, they saw through the rich American's scheme.

The world knew, and Graustark knew, just what Mr. Blithers was after, and the worst of it all was that Mr. Blithers also knew, which was more to the point. But, said Baron Gourou, Graustark knew something that neither the world nor Mr. Blithers knew, and that was its own mind. Never, said he, would Maud Applegate be recognised as the Princess of Graustark, not if she lived for a thousand years and married Robin as many times as she had hairs on her head. At least, he amended, that was the way every one felt about it at present.

The afternoon papers had published the brief statement prepared by Robin in the seclusion of his stateroom on board the *Jupiter* immediately after a most enjoyable hour with Miss Guile. It was a curt and extremely positive denial of the rumoured engagement, with the additional information that he never had seen Miss Blithers and was more or less certain that she never had set eyes on him.

A rather staggering co-incidence appeared with the published report that Miss Blithers herself was supposed to be somewhere in Europe, word having been received that day from sources in London that she had sailed from New York under an assumed name. The imaginative French journals put two and two together and dwelt upon the possibility that the two young people who had never seen each other might have crossed the Atlantic on the same steamer, seeing each other frequently and yet remaining entirely in the dark, so to speak. Inspired writers began to weave a romance out of the probabilities.

On one point Robin was adamantine. He refused positively to have his identity disclosed at this time, and Gourou had to say to the newspapers that the Prince was even then on his way to Vienna, hurrying homeward as fast as steel cars could carry him. He admitted that the young man had arrived on the *Jupiter* that morning, having remained in the closest seclusion all the way across the Atlantic.

This equivocation necessitated the most cautious rearrangement of plans on the part of the Baron. He

was required to act as though he had no acquaintance with either of the three travellers stopping at the Ritz, although for obvious reasons he took up a temporary abode there himself. Moreover, he had to telegraph the Prime Minister in Edelweiss that the Prince was not to be budged, and would in all likelihood postpone his return to the capitol. All of which stamped the honest Baron as a most prodigious liar, if one stops to think of what he said to the reporters.

The newspapers also printed a definite bit of news in the shape of a despatch from New York to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. William W. Blithers were sailing for Europe on the ensuing day, bound for Graustark!

However, the chief and present concern of the three loyal gentlemen in midnight conclave was not centred in the trouble that Mr. Blithers had started, but in the more desperate situation created by Miss Guile. She was the peril that now confronted them, and she was indeed a peril. Quinnox and Dank explained the situation to the Minister of Police, and the Minister of Police admitted that the deuce was to pay.

"There is but one way out of it," said he, speaking officially, "and that is the simplest one I know of."

"Assassination, I suppose," said Dank scornfully.

"It rests with me, gentlemen," said the Baron, ignoring the lieutenant's remark, "to find Miss Guile and take her into my confidence in respect —"

"No use," said Dank, and, to his surprise, the Count repeated the words after him.

"Miss Guile is a lady, Baron," said the latter gloomily. "You cannot go to her with a command to clear out, keep her hands off, or any such thing. She would be justified in having you kicked out of the house. We must not annoy Miss Guile. That is quite out of the question."

"By jove!" exclaimed Dank, so loudly that his companions actually jumped in their seats. They looked at him in amazement,— the Count with something akin to apprehension in his eyes. Had the fellow lost his mind over the girl? Before they could ask what he meant by shouting at the top of his voice, he repeated the ejaculation, but less explosively. His eyes were bulging and his mouth remained agape.

"What ails you, Dank?" demanded the Baron, removing his eyes from the young man's face long enough to glance fearfully at the transom.

"I've — I've got it!" cried the soldier, and then sank back in his chair, quite out of breath. The Baron got up and took a peep into the hallway, and then carefully locked the door. "What are you locking the door for?" demanded Dank, sitting up suddenly. "It's only a theory that I've got — but it is wonderful. Absolutely staggering."

"Oh!" said Gourou, but he did not unlock the door. "A theory, eh?" He came back and stood facing the young man.

"Count," began Dank excitedly, "you remember the big red letter B on all of her trunks, don't you? Hobbs is positive he —"

Count Quinnox sprang to his feet and banged the table with his fist.

"By jove!" he shouted, suddenly comprehending.

"The letter B?" queried Gourou, perplexed.

"The newspapers say that she sailed from New York under an assumed name," went on Dank, thrilled by his own amazing cleverness. "There you are! Plain as day. The letter B explains everything. Now we know who Miss Guile really is. She's —"

"Maud!" exclaimed Quinnox, sinking back into his chair.

"Miss Blithers!" cried Gourou, divining at last. "By jove!" And thus was the jovian circle completed.

It was two o'clock before the three gentlemen separated and retired to rest, each fully convinced that the situation was even more complicated than before, for in view of this new and most convincing revelation there now could be no adequate defence against the alluring Miss Guile.

Robin was informed bright and early the next morning. In fact, he was still in his pajamas when the news was carried to him by the exhausted Dank, who had spent five hours in bed but none in slumber. Never in all his ardent career had the smart lieutenant been so bitterly afflicted with love-sickness as now.

"I don't believe a word of it," said the Prince promptly. "You've been dreaming, old chap."

"That letter B isn't a dream, is it?"

"No, it isn't," said Robin, and instantly sat up

in bed, his face very serious. "If she should turn out to be Miss Blithers, I've cooked my goose to a crisp. Good Lord, when I think of some of the things I said to her about the Blithers family! But wait! If she is Miss Blithers do you suppose she'd sit calmly by and hear the family ridiculed? No, sir! She would have taken my head off like a flash. She —"

"I've no doubt she regarded the situation as extremely humorous," said Dank, "and laughed herself almost sick over the way she was fooling you."

"That might sound reasonable enough, Dank, if she had known who I was. But where was the fun in fooling an utter outsider like R. Schmidt? It doesn't hold together."

"Americans have an amazing notion of humour, I am reliably informed. They appear to be able to see a joke under the most distressing circumstances. I'll stake my head that she is Miss Blithers."

"I can't imagine anything more terrible," groaned Robin, lying down flat again and staring at the ceiling.

"I shouldn't call her terrible," protested Dank, rather stiffly.

"I refer to the situation, Dank,— the mess, in other words. It *is* a mess, isn't it?"

"I suppose you'll see nothing more of her, your highness," remarked Dank, a sly hope struggling in his breast.

"You'd better put it the other way. She'll see nothing more of me," lugubriously.

"I mean to say, sir, you can't go on with it, can you?"

"Go on with what?"

"The — er — you know," floundered Dank.

"If there is really anything to go on with, Dank, I'll go on with it, believe me."

The lieutenant stared. "But if she *should* be Miss Blithers, what then?"

"It might simplify matters tremendously," said Robin, but not at all confidently. "I think I'll get up, Dank, if you don't mind. Call Hobbs, will you? And, I say, won't you have breakfast up here with me?"

"I had quite overlooked breakfast, 'pon my soul, I had," said Dank, a look of pain in his face. "No wonder I have a headache, going without my coffee so long."

Later on, while they were breakfasting in Robin's sitting room, Hobbs brought in the morning newspapers. He laid one of them before the Prince, and jabbed his forefinger upon a glaring headline.

"I beg pardon, sir; I didn't mean to get it into the butter. Very awkward, I'm sure. Hi, *garçon!* Fresh butter 'ere, and lively about it, too. *Buerre!* That's the word — buttah."

Robin and Dank were staring at the headline as if fascinated. Having successfully managed the butter, Hobbs at once restored his attention to the headline, reading it aloud, albeit both of the young men were

capable of reading French at sight. He translated with great profundity.

"'Miss Blithers Denies Report. Signed Statement Mysteriously Received. American Heiress not to wed Prince of Graustark.' Shall I read the harticle, sir?"

Robin snatched up the paper and read aloud for himself. Hobbs merely wiped a bit of butter from his finger and listened attentively.

The following card appeared at the head of the column, and was supplemented by a complete résumé of the Blithers-Graustark muddle:

"Miss Blithers desires to correct an erroneous report that has appeared in the newspapers. She is not engaged to be married to the Prince of Graustark, nor is there even the remotest probability that such will ever be the case. Miss Blithers regrets that she has not the honour of Prince Robin's acquaintance, and the Prince has specifically stated in the public prints that he does not know her by sight. The statements of the two persons most vitally affected by this disturbing rumour should be taken as final. Sufficient pain and annoyance already has been caused by the malicious and utterly groundless report." The name of Maud Applegate Blithers was appended to the statement, and it was dated Paris, August 29.

Thereafter followed a lengthy description of the futile search for the young lady in Paris, and an interview with the local representatives of Mr. Blithers, all of whom declared that the signature was genuine,

but refused to commit themselves further without consulting their employer. They could throw no light upon the situation, even going so far as to declare that they were unaware of the presence of Miss Blithers in Paris.

It appears that the signed statement was left in the counting-rooms of the various newspapers by a heavily veiled lady at an hour agreed upon as "about ten o'clock." There was absolutely no clue to the identity of this woman.

Instead of following the suggestion of Miss Blithers that "sufficient pain and annoyance already had been caused," the journalists proceeded to increase the agony by venturing the hope that fresh developments would materialise before the day was done.

"Well, she appears to be here," said Robin, as he laid down the last of the three journals and stared at Dank as if expecting hope from that most unreliable source.

"I suppose you will now admit that I am right about the letter B," said Dank sullenly.

"When I see Miss Guile I shall ask point blank if she is Maud Applegate, Dank, and if she says she isn't, I'll take her word for it," said Robin.

"And if she says she is?"

"Well," said the Prince, ruefully, "I'll still take her word for it."

"And then?"

"Then I shall be equally frank and tell her that I

am Robin of Graustark. That will put us all square again, and we'll see what comes of it in the end."

"You don't mean to say you'll — you'll continue as you were?" gasped Dank.

"That depends entirely on Miss Guile, Boske."

"But you wouldn't dare to marry Maud Applegate Blithers, sir. You would be driven out of Graustark and —"

"I think that would depend a good deal on Miss Guile, too, old chap," said Robin coolly.

Dank swallowed very hard. "I want to be loyal to you, your highness," he said as if he did not think it would be possible to remain so.

"I shall count on you, Dank," said Robin earnestly.

"But —" began the lieutenant, and then stopped short.

"Let me finish it for you. You don't feel as though you could be loyal to Miss Blithers, is that it?"

"I think that would depend on Miss Blithers," said Dank, and then begged to be excused. He went out of the room rather hurriedly.

"Well, Hobbs," said Robin, after his astonishment had abated, "what do *you* think of it?"

"I think he's in love with her, sir," said Hobbs promptly.

"Good Lord! with — with Miss Guile?"

"Precisely so, sir."

"Well, I'll be *darned!*" said the American half of Prince Robin with great fervour.

"Tut, tut, sir," reproved Hobbs, who, as has been

said before, was a privileged character by virtue of long service and his previous calling as a Cook's interpreter. "Are you going out, sir?"

"Yes. I'm going out to search the highways and by-ways for Bedelia," said Robin, a gay light in his eyes. "By the way, did you, by any chance, learn the name of the 'andsome young gent as went away with 'er, 'Obbs?"

"I did not, sir. I stood at his helbow for quite some time at the Gare St. Lazare and the only words he spoke that I could hear distinctly was 'wot the devil do you mean, me man? Ain't there room enough for you here without standing on my toes like that? Move hover.' Only, of course, sir, he used the haspirates after a fashion of his own. The haitches are mine, sir."

"Is he an American?"

"It's difficult to say, sir. He may be from Boston, but you never can tell, sir."

"Do you know Boston, Hobbs?" inquired the Prince, adjusting his tie before the mirror.

"Not to speak it, sir," said Hobbs.

The day was warm and clear, and Paris was gleaming. Robin stretched his long legs in a brisk walk across the Place Vendome and up the Rue de la Paix to the Boulevard. Here he hesitated and then retraced his steps slowly down the street of diamonds, for he suspected Miss Guile of being interested in things that were costly. Suddenly inspired, he made his way to the Place de la Concorde and settled him-

self on one of the seats near the entrance to the Champs Elysees. It was his shrewd argument that if she planned a ride on that exquisite morning it naturally would be along the great avenue, and in that event he might reasonably hope to catch her coming or going. A man came up and took a seat beside him.

"Good morning, Mr. Schmidt," said the newcomer, and Robin somewhat gruffly demanded what the deuce he meant by following him. "I have some interesting news," said Baron Gourou quietly, removing his hat to wipe a damp brow. He also took the time to recover his breath after some rather sharp dodging of automobiles in order to attain his present position of security. Even a Minister of Police has to step lively in Paris.

"From home?" asked Robin carelessly.

"Indirectly. It comes through Berlin. Our special agent there wires me that the offices of Mr. Blithers in that city have received instructions from him to send engineers to Edelweiss for the purpose of estimating the cost of remodelling and rebuilding the castle,— in other words to restore it to its condition prior to the Marlanx rebellion fifteen years ago."

There was a tantalising smile on the Baron's face as he watched the changing expressions in that of his Prince.

"Are you in earnest?" demanded Robin, a bright red spot appearing in each cheek. The Baron nodded his head. "Well, he's got a lot of nerve!"

"I shudder when I think of what is likely to happen to those architects when they begin snooping around the castle," said Gourou drily. "By the way, have you seen Miss Guile this morning?"

Robin's cheeks were now completely suffused. "Certainly not."

"She was in the Rue de la Paix half an hour ago. I thought you might —"

"You saw her, Baron?"

"Yes, highness, and it may interest you to know that she saw you."

"The deuce you say! But how do you know that it was Miss Guile. You've no means of knowing."

"It is a part of my profession to recognise people from given descriptions. In this case, however, the identification was rendered quite simple by the actions of the young lady herself. She happened to emerge from a shop just as you were passing and I've never seen any one, criminal or otherwise, seek cover as quickly as she did. She darted back into the shop like one pursued by the devil. Naturally I hung around for a few minutes to see the rest of the play. Presently she peered forth, looked stealthily up and down the street, and then dashed across the pavement to a waiting taxi-metre. It affords me pleasure to inform your highness that I took the number of the machine." He glanced at his cuff-band.

"Where did she go from the Rue de la Paix?" asked Robin impatiently.

"To the Ritz. I was there almost as soon as she.

She handed an envelope — containing a letter, I fancy — to the carriage man and drove away in the direction of the Place de l'Opera. I have a sly notion, my Prince, that you will find a note awaiting you on your return to the hotel. Ah, you appear to be in haste, my young hunter."

"I am in haste. If you expect to keep alongside, Baron, you'll have to run I'm afraid," cried the Prince, and was instantly in his seven-league boots.

There was a note in Robin's rooms when he reached the hotel. It was not the delicately perfumed article that usually is despatched by fictional heroines but a rather business-like envelope bearing the well-known words "The New York Herald" in one corner and the name "R. Schmidt, Hotel Ritz," in firm but angular scrawl across its face. As Robin ripped it open with his finger, Baron Gourou entered the room, but not without giving vent to a slight cough in the way of an announcement.

"You forget, highness, that I am a short man and not possessed of legs that travel by yards instead of feet," he panted. "Forgive me for lagging behind. I did my best to keep up with you."

Robin stared at his visitor haughtily for a moment and then broke into a good-humoured laugh.

"Won't you sit down, Baron? I'll be at liberty in a minute or two," he said, and coolly proceeded to scan the brief message from Miss Guile.

"Well," said Gourou, as the young man replaced the letter in the envelope and stuck it into his pocket.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAT IS AWAY

Robin's face was glowing with excitement. He put his hands in his trousers pockets and nervously jingled the coins therein, all the while regarding his Minister of Police with speculative eyes. Then he turned to the window and continued to stare down into the Place Vendome for several minutes, obviously turning something over in his mind before coming to a decision. The Baron waited. None knew better than he how to wait. He realised that a great deal hung upon the next few sentences to be uttered in that room, and yet he could be patient.

At last Robin faced him, but without speaking. An instant later he impulsively withdrew the letter from his pocket and held it out to the Baron, who strode across the room and took it from his hand. Without a word, he extracted the single sheet of paper and read what was written thereon.

"I gather from the nature of the invitation that you are expected to enjoy stolen fruit, if I may be so bold as to put it in just that way," said he grimly. "Apparently Miss Guile finds the presence of a duenna unnecessarily wise."

"There's no harm in a quiet little excursion such as she suggests, Baron," said Robin, defensively.

"You forget that I have seen the beautiful Miss Guile," said Gourou drily. "I take it, then, that you approve of the young lady's scheme."

"Scheme sounds rather sinister, doesn't it?"

"Trick, if it please you more than the other. Moreover, I cannot say that she *suggests* the quiet little excursion. It occurs to me that she commands, your highness." He held the missive to the light and read, a tender irony in his voice: "'My motor will call for you at three this afternoon, and we will run out to St. Cloud for tea; at the Pavillon Bleu. Mrs. Gaston is spending the day with relatives at Champigny, and we may as well be mice under the circumstances. If you have another engagement, pray do not let it interfere with the pleasure I am seeking.' Nothing could be more exacting, my dear Prince. She signs herself 'B. Guile,' and I am sure she is magnificently beguiling, if you will pardon the play on words."

"You wouldn't adopt that tone of suspicion if you knew Miss Guile," said Robin stiffly. "I am sure nothing could be more frank and above-board than her manner of treating the —"

"And nothing so cock-sure and confident," put in the Baron. "It would serve her right if you ignored the letter altogether."

"If I were as old as you, Baron, I haven't the least doubt that I should do so," said Robin coolly. "And by the same token, if you were as young as I, you'd

do precisely the thing that I intend to do. I'm going to St. Cloud with her."

"Oh, I haven't been in doubt about that for an instant," said Gourou. "At your age I greatly favoured the clandestine. You will not pretend to assume that this is not a clandestine excursion."

"It's a jolly little adventure," was all that Robin could say, in his youthfulness.

The Baron was thoughtful. "There is something behind this extraordinary behaviour on the part of a lady generally accredited with sense and refinement," said he after a moment. "I think I have it, too. She is deliberately putting you to a rather severe test."

"Test? What do you mean?"

"She is trying you out, sir. Miss Guile,— or possibly Miss Blithers,— is taking a genuine risk in order to determine whether you are a real gentleman or only a make-believe. She is taking a chance with you. You may call it a jolly little adventure, but I call it the acid test. Young women of good breeding and refinement do not plan such adventures with casual, ship-board acquaintances. She intends to find out *what*, not *who*, you are. I must say she's exceedingly clever and courageous."

Robin laughed. "Thank you, Baron. Forewarned is forearmed. I shall remain a gentleman at any cost."

"She is so shrewd and resourceful that I am almost

convinced she can be no other than the daughter of the amazing Mr. Blithers. I believe he achieved most of his success through sheer impudence, though it is commonly described as daring."

"In any case, Baron, I shall make it a point to find out whether she is the lady who defies the amazing Mr. Blithers, and goes into print about it."

"She has merely denied that she is engaged to the Prince of Graustark. Pray do not come back to us with the news that she is engaged to R. Schmidt," said Gourou significantly.

Robin smiled reflectively. "That *would* make a jolly adventure of it, wouldn't it?"

At three o'clock, a big limousine swung under the porte cochere at the Ritz and a nimble footman hopped down and entered the hotel. Robin was waiting just inside the doors. He recognised the car as the one that had taken Miss Guile away from the Gare St. Lazare, and stepped forward instantly to intercept the man.

"For Mr. Schmidt?" he inquired.

"Oui, M'sieur."

Thrilled by a pleasurable sense of excitement, the Prince of Graustark entered the car. He was quick to observe that the curtains in the side windows were partially drawn across the glass. The fact that she elected to journey to the country in a limousine on this hot day did not strike him as odd, for he knew that the comfort loving French people prefer the closed vehicle to the wind-inviting, dust-gathering touring

body of the Americans and British. He observed the single letter L in gold in the panel of the door, and made mental note of the smart livery of the two men on the front seat.

A delicate perfume lingered in the car, convincing proof that Miss Guile had left it but a few minutes before its arrival at the Ritz. As a matter of fact, she was nearer than he thought, for the car whirled into the Rue de la Paix and stopped at the curb not more than a hundred yards from the Place Vendome.

Once more the nimble footman hopped down and threw open the door. A slender, swift-moving figure in a blue linen gown and a wide hat from which sprung two gorgeous blue plumes, emerged from the door of a diamond merchant's shop, and, before Robin could move from his corner, popped into the car and sat down beside him with a nervous little laugh on her lips — red lips that showed rose-like and tempting behind a thick chiffon veil, obviously donned for an excellent reason. The exquisite features of Miss Guile were barely distinguishable beneath the surface of this filmy barrier. The door closed sharply and, almost before the Prince had recovered from his surprise, the car glided off in the direction of the Place de l'Opera.

"Isn't it just like an elopement?" cried Miss Guile, and it was quite plain to him that she was vastly pleased with the sprightly introduction to the adventure. Her voice trembled slightly and she sat up very straight in the wide, comfortable seat.

"Is it really you?" cried Robin, and he was surprised to find that his own voice trembled.

"Oh," she said, with a sudden diffidence, "how do you do? What must you think of me, bouncing in like that and never once speaking to you?"

"If I were to tell you what I think of you, you'd bounce right out again without speaking to me," said he, smiling. "How do you do?" He extended his hand, but it was ignored. She sank back into the corner and looked at him for a moment as if uncertain what to say or do next. The shadowy red lips were smiling and the big dark eyes were eloquent, even through the screen.

"I may as well tell you at the outset, Mr. Schmidt, that I've never — *never* — done a thing like this before," she said, an uneasy note in her voice.

"I am quite sure of that," said he, "and therefore confess to a vast wealth of satisfaction."

"What *do* you think of me?"

"I think that you are frightened almost out of your boots," said he boldly.

"No, I'm not," said she resolutely. "I am only conscious of feeling extremely foolish."

"I shouldn't feel that way about stealing off for a cup of tea," said he. "It's all quite regular, you know, and is frequently done in the very best circles when the cat's away."

"You see, I couldn't quite scrape up the courage to go directly to the hotel for you," she said. "I know several people who are stopping there and I —

I—well, you won't think I'm a dreadful person, will you?"

"Not at all," he declared promptly. Then he resolved to put one of the questions he had made up his mind to ask at the first opportunity. "Do you mind telling me why you abandoned me so completely, so heartlessly on the day we landed?"

"Because there was no reason why I should act otherwise, Mr. Schmidt," she said, the tremor gone from her voice.

"And yet you take me to St. Cloud for tea," he said pointedly.

"Ah, but no one is to know of this," she cried warmly. "This is a secret, a very secret adventure."

He could not help staring. "And that is just why I am mystified. Why is to-day so different from yesterday?"

"It isn't," she said. "Doesn't all this prove it?"

His face fell. "Don't you want to be seen with me, Miss Guile? Am I not—"

"Wait! Will you not be satisfied with things as they are and refrain from asking unnecessary questions?"

"I shall have to be satisfied," said he ruefully.

"I am sorry I said that, Mr. Schmidt," she cried, contrite at once. "There is absolutely no reason why I should not be seen with you. But won't you be appeased when I say that I wanted to be with you alone to-day?"

He suddenly remembered the Baron's shrewd con-

jecture and let the opportunity to say something banal go by without a word. Perhaps it was a test, after all. He merely replied that she was paying him a greater compliment than he deserved.

"There are many things I want to speak about, Mr. Schmidt, and — and you know how impossible it is to — to get a moment to one's self when one is being watched like a child, as I am being watched over by dear Mrs. Gaston. She is my shield and armour, my lovely one-headed dragon. I placed myself in her care and — well, she is a very dependable person. You *will* understand, won't you?"

"Pray do not distress yourself, Miss Guile," he protested. "The last word is spoken. I am too happy to spoil the day by doubting its integrity. Besides, I believe I know you better than you think I do."

He expected her to reveal some sign of dismay, but she was suddenly on guard.

"Then you will not mind my eccentricities," she said calmly, "and we shall have a very nice drive, some tea and a — lark in place of the more delectable birds prescribed by the chef at the Pavillon Bleu."

As the car turned into the Boulevard des Capucines Robin suppressed an exclamation of annoyance on beholding Baron Gourou and Dank standing on the curb almost within arm's length of the car as it passed. The former was peering rather intently at the two men on the front seat, and evinced little or no interest in the occupants of the tonneau.

"Wasn't that your friend Mr. Dank?" inquired Miss Guile with interest. He felt that she was chiding him.

"Yes," said he, and then turned for another look at his compatriots. Gourou was jotting something down on his cuff-band. The Prince mentally promised him something for his pains. "But let us leave dull care behind," he went on gaily.

"He isn't at all dull," said she.

"But he *is* a care," said he. "He is always losing his heart, Miss Guile."

"And picking up some one else's, I fancy," said she.

"By the way, who was the good-looking chap that came to Cherbourg to meet you?"

"A very old friend, Mr. Schmidt. I've known him since I was that high." (That high was on a line with her knee.)

"Attractive fellow," was his comment.

"Do you think so?" she inquired innocently, and he thought she over-played it a little. He was conscious of an odd sense of disappointment in her. "Have you never been out to St. Cloud? No? I never go there without feeling a terrible pity for those poor prodigals who stood beside its funeral pyre and saw their folly stripped down to the starkest of skeletons while they waited. The day of glory is short, Mr. Schmidt, and the night that follows is bitterly long. They say possession is nine points of the law, but what do nine points mean to the lawless? The rich man,

of to-day may be the beggar of to-morrow, and the rich man's sons and daughters may be serving the beggars of yesterday. I have been told that in the lower east side of New York City there are men and women who were once princes and princesses, counts and countesses, dukes and duchesses. Why doesn't some one write a novel about the royalty that hides its beggary in the slums of that great city?"

"What's this? Epigrams and philosophy, Miss Guile?" he exclaimed wonderingly. "You amaze me. What are you trying to convey? That some day you may be serving yesterday's beggar?"

"Who knows!" she said cryptically. "I am not a philosopher, and I'm sorry about the epigrams. I loathe people who make use of them. They are a cheap substitution for wisdom. Do you take sugar in your tea?" It was her way of abandoning the topic, but he looked his perplexity. "I thought I'd ask now, just for the sake of testing my memory later on." She was laughing.

"Two lumps and cream," he said. "Won't you be good enough to take off that veil? It seriously obstructs the view."

She complacently shook her head. "It doesn't obstruct mine," she said. "Have you been reading what the papers are saying about your friend Mr. Blithers and his obstreperous Maud?"

Robin caught his breath. In a flash he suspected an excellent reason for keeping the veil in place. It gave her a distinct advantage over him.

"Yes. I see that she positively denies the whole business."

"Likewise the prospective spouse," she added. "Isn't it sickening?"

"I wonder what Mr. Blithers is saying to-day," said he audaciously. "Poor old cock, he must be as sore as a crab. By the way, it is reported that she crossed on the steamer with us."

"I am quite certain that she did, Mr. Schmidt," said she.

"You really think so?" he cried, regarding her keenly.

"The man who came to meet me knows her quite well. He is confident that he saw her at Cherbourg."

"I see," said he, and was thoroughly convinced. "I may as well confess to you, Miss Guile, that I also know her when I see her."

"But you told me positively that you had never seen her, Mr. Schmidt," she said quickly.

"I had not seen her up to the second day out on the *Jupiter*," he explained, enjoying himself immensely.

"It was after that that you —"

"I know," he said, as she hesitated; "but you see I didn't know she was Miss Blithers until sometime after I had met you." There was a challenge in his manner amounting almost to a declaration.

She leaned forward to regard him more intently.

"Is it possible, Mr. Schmidt, that you suspect *me* of being that horrid, vulgar creature?"

Robin was not to be trapped. There was something in the shadowy eyes that warned him.

"At least, I may say that I do not suspect you of being a horrid, vulgar creature," he said evasively.

"What else can this Miss Blithers be if not that?"

"Would you say that she is vulgar because she refuses to acknowledge a condition that doesn't exist? I think she did perfectly right in denying the engagement."

"You haven't answered my question, Mr. Schmidt."

"Well," he began slowly, "I don't suspect you of being Miss Blithers."

"But you did suspect it."

"I was pleasantly engaged in speculation that's all. It is generally believed that Miss Blithers sailed under an assumed name — literally, not figuratively."

"Is there any reason why you should imagine that my name is not Guile?"

"Yes. Your luggage is resplendently marked with the second letter in the alphabet — a gory, crimson B."

"I see," she said reflectively. "You examined my luggage, as they say in the customs office. And you couldn't put B and G together, is that it?"

"Obviously."

"If you had taken the trouble to look, you would have found an equally resplendent G on the opposite end of each and every trunk, Mr. Schmidt," she said quietly.

"I did not examine your luggage, Miss Guile,"

said he stiffly. She hadn't left much for him to stand upon. "Rather unique way to put one's initials on a trunk, isn't it?"

"It possesses the virtue of originality," she admitted, "and it never fails to excite curiosity. I am sorry you were misled. Nothing could be more distressing than to be mistaken for the heroine of a story and then turn out to be a mere nobody in the end. I've no doubt that if the amiable Miss Blithers were to hear of it, she'd rush into print and belabour me with the largest type that money could buy."

"Oh, come now, Miss Guile," he protested, "it really isn't fair to Miss Blithers. She was justified in following an illustrious example. You forget that the Prince of Graustark was the first to rush into print with a flat denial. What else could the poor girl do?"

"Oh, I am not defending the Prince of Graustark. He behaved abominably, rushing into print as you say. Extremely bad taste, I should call it."

Robin's ears burned. He could not defend himself. There was nothing left for him to do but to say that it "served him jolly well right, the way Miss Blithers came back at him."

"Still," she said, "I would be willing to make a small wager that the well-advertised match comes off in spite of all the denials. Given a determined father, an ambitious mother, a purse-filled daughter and an empty-pursed nobleman, and I don't see how the inevitable can be avoided."

His face was flaming. It was with difficulty that he

restrained the impulse to put her right in the matter without further ado.

"Are you sure that the Prince is so empty of purse as all that?" he managed to say, without betraying himself irretrievably.

"There doesn't seem to be any doubt that he borrowed extensively of Mr. Blithers," she said scornfully. "He is under some obligations to his would-be-father-in-law, I submit, now isn't he?"

"I suppose so, Miss Guile," he admitted uncomfortably.

"And therefore owes him something more than a card in the newspapers, don't you think?"

"Really, Miss Guile, I — I —"

"I beg your pardon. The Prince's affairs are of no importance to you, so why should I expect you to stand up for him?"

"I confess that I am a great deal more interested in Miss Blithers than I am in the Prince. By the way, what would you have done had you been placed in her position?"

"I think I should have acted quite as independently as she."

"If your father were to pick out a husband for you, whether or no, you would refuse to obey the paternal command?"

"Most assuredly. As a matter of fact, Mr. Schmidt, my father has expressed a wish that I should marry a man who doesn't appeal to me at all."

"And you refuse?"

"Absolutely."

"More or less as Miss Blithers has done," he said pointedly.

"Miss Blithers, I understand, has the advantage of me in one respect. I am told that she wants to marry another man and is very much in love with him."

"A chap named Scoville," said Robin, unguardedly.

"You know him, Mr. Schmidt?"

"No. I've merely heard of him. I take it from your remark that you don't want to marry anybody — at present."

"Quite right. Not at present. Now let us talk of something else. *A bas* Blithers! Down with the plutocrats! Stamp out the vulgarians! Is there anything else you can suggest?" she cried gaily.

"Long live the Princess Maud!" said he, and doffed his hat. The satirical note in his voice was not lost on her. She started perceptibly, and caught her breath. Then she sank back into the corner with a nervous, strained little laugh.

"You think she will marry him?"

"I think as you do about it, Miss Guile," said he, and she was silenced.

CHAPTER XV

THE MICE IN A TRAP

They had a table in a cool, shady corner of the broad porch overlooking the Place d'Armes and the Seine and its vociferous ferries. To the right runs the gleaming roadway that leads to the hills and glades through which pomp and pride once strode with such fatal arrogance. Blue coated servitors attended them on their arrival, and watched over them during their stay. It was as if Miss Guile were the fairy princess who had but to wish and her slightest desire was gratified. Her guest, a real prince, marvelled not a little at the complete sway she exercised over this somewhat autocratic army of menials. They bowed and scraped, and fetched, and carried, and were not Swiss but slaves in Bagdad during the reign of its most illustrious Caliph, Al-haroun Raschid the great. The magic of Araby could have been no more potent than the spell this beautiful girl cast over the house of Mammon. She laid her finger upon a purse of gold and wished, and lo! the wonders of the magic carpet were repeated.

Robin remembered that Maud Applegate Blithers had spent the greater part of her life in Paris, and it was therefore not unreasonable to suppose that she had spent something else as well. At any rate, the

Pavillon Bleu was a place where it *had* to be spent if one wanted the attention accorded the few.

She had removed her veil, but he was not slow to perceive that she sat with her back to the long stretch of porch.

"Do you prefer this place to Armenonville or the Paillard at Pre Catelan, Miss Guile?" he inquired, quite casually, but with a secret purpose.

"No, it is stupid here, as a rule, and common. Still every one goes to the other places in the afternoon and I particularly wanted to be as naughty as possible, so I came here to-day."

"It doesn't strike me as especially naughty," he remarked.

"But it was very, very naughty before you and I were born, Mr. Schmidt. The atmosphere still remains, if one possesses a comprehensive imagination."

"I daresay," said he, "but the imagination doesn't thrive on tea. Those were the days of burgundy and a lot of other red things."

"One doesn't need to be in shackles to expatiate on the terrors of the Bridge of Sighs," she said.

"Are you going to take me up to the park?"

"Yes. Into the Shadows."

"Oh, that's good! I'm sure my imagination will work beautifully when it isn't subdued by all these blue devils. I — *Que voulez vous?*" The question was directed rather sharply to a particularly deferential "blue devil" who stood at his elbow.

"Monsieur Schmidt?"

"Yes. What's this? A letter! 'Pon my soul, how the deuce could any one —" He got no farther, for Miss Guile's action in pulling down her veil and the subsequent spasmodic glance over her shoulder betrayed such an agitated state of mind on her part that his own sensations were checked at the outset.

"There must be some one here who knows you, Mr. Schmidt," she said nervously. "See what it says, please,— at once. I — perhaps we should be starting home immediately."

Robin tore open the envelope. A glance showed him that the brief note was from Gourou. A characteristic G served as a signature. As he read, a hard line appeared between his eyes and his expression grew serious.

"It is really nothing, Miss Guile," he said and prepared to tear the sheet into many pieces. "A stupid, alleged joke of a fellow who happens to know me, that's all."

"Don't tear it up!" she cried sharply. "What does it say? I have a right to know, Mr. Schmidt, even though it is only a joke. What has this friend of yours to say about me? What coarse, uncalled-for comment has he to make about —"

"Let me think for a moment, Miss Guile," he interrupted, suddenly realising that it was time for reflection. After a moment he said soberly: "I think it would be wise if we were to leave instantly. There is nothing to be alarmed about, I assure you, but — well, we'd better go."

"Will you allow me to see that letter?" she asked, extending her hand.

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind."

"But I insist, sir! I'll not go a step from this place until I know what all this is about."

"As it happens to concern you even more than it does me, I suppose you'd better see what it says." He passed the letter over to her and watched her narrowly as she read. Again the veil served as a competent mask.

"Who wrote this letter, Mr. Schmidt?" she demanded. Even through the veil he could see that her eyes were wide with — was it alarm or anger?

"A man named Gourou. He is a detective engaged on a piece of work for Mr. Totten."

"Is it a part of his duty to watch your movements?" she asked, leaning forward.

"No. He is my friend, however," said Robin steadily. "According to this epistle, it would appear that it is a part of his duty to keep track of you, not me. May I ask why you should be shadowed by two of his kind?"

She did not answer at once. When she spoke, it was with a determined effort to maintain her composure.

"I am sorry to have subjected you to all this, Mr. Schmidt. We will depart at once. I find that the cat is never away, so we can't be mice. What a fool I've been." There was something suspiciously suggestive of tears in her soft voice.

He laid a hand upon the small fingers that clutched the crumpled sheet of paper. To have saved his life, he could not keep the choked, husky tremor out of his voice.

"The day is spoiled for you. That is my only regret. As for me, Miss Guile, I am not without sin, so I may cast no stones. Pray regard me as a fellow culprit, and rest assured that I have no bone to pick with you. I too am watched and yet I am no more of a criminal than you. Will you allow me to say that I am a friend whose devotion cannot be shaken by all the tempests in the world?"

"Thank you," she said, and turned her hand under his to give it a quick, convulsive clasp. Her spirits seemed to revive under the responsive grip. "You might have said all the tempests in a tea pot, for that is really what it amounts to. My father is a very foolish man. Will you send for the car?"

He called an attendant and ordered him to find Miss Guile's footman at once. When he returned to the table, she was reading the note once more.

"It is really quite thrilling, isn't it?" she said, and there was still a quaver of indignation in her voice. "Are you not mystified?"

"Not in the least," said he promptly, and drew a chair up close beside hers. "It's as plain as day. Your father has found you out, that's all. Let's read it again," and they read it together.

"A word to the wise," it began. "Two men from

a private detective concern have been employed since yesterday in watching the movements of your companion, for the purpose of safe-guarding her against good-looking young men, I suspect. I have it from the most reliable of sources that her father engaged the services of these men almost simultaneously with the date of our sailing from New York. It may interest you to know that they followed you to St. Cloud in a high-power car and no doubt are watching you as you read this message from your faithful friend, who likewise is not far away."

"I should have anticipated this, Mr. Schmidt," she said ruefully. "It is just the sort of thing my father would do."

"You seem to take it calmly enough."

"I am quite used to it. I would be worth a great deal to any enterprising person who made it his business to steal me. There is no limit to the ransom he could demand."

"You alarm me," he declared. "No doubt these worthy guardians look upon me as a kidnapper. I am inclined to shiver."

"'All's well that ends well,'" quoth she, pulling on her gloves. "I shall restore you safely to the bosom of the Ritz and that will be the end of it."

"I almost wish that some one would kidnap you, Miss Guile. It would afford me the greatest pleasure in the world to snatch you from their clutches. Your father would be saved paying the ransom but I

should have to be adequately rewarded. I fancy, however, that he wouldn't mind paying the reward I should hold out for."

"I am quite sure he would give you anything you were to ask for, Mr. Schmidt," said she gaily. "You would be reasonable, of course."

"I might ask for the most precious of his possessions," said he, leaning forward to look directly into eyes that wavered and refused to meet his.

"Curiosity almost makes me wish that I might be kidnapped. I should then find out what you consider to be his most precious possession," she said, and her voice was perilously low.

"I think I could tell you in advance," said he, his eyes shining.

"I — I prefer to find out in my own way, Mr. Schmidt," she stammered hurriedly. Her confusion was immensely gratifying to him. There is no telling what might have happened to the Prince of Graustark at that moment if an obsequious attendant had not intervened with the earthly information that the car was waiting.

"Good Lord," Robin was saying to himself as he followed her to the steps, "was I about to go directly against the sage advice of old Gourou? Was I so near to it as that? In another minute — Gee, but it was a close shave. She is adorable, she is the most adorable creature in the world, even though she is the daughter of old man Blithers, and I —'gad I wonder what will come of it in the end? Keep a tight

grip on yourself, Bobby, or you're a goner, sure as fate."

They were painfully aware of the fact that their progress down the long verandah was made under the surveillance of two, perhaps three pairs of unwavering eyes, and because of it they looked neither to right nor left but as those who walk tight-ropes over dangerous places. There was something positively uncanny in the feeling that their every movement was being watched by secret observers. Once inside the car, Miss Guile sank back with a long sigh of relief.

"Did you feel it, too?" she asked, with a nervous little catch in her voice.

"I did," said he, passing his hand over his brow. "It was like being alone in the dark with eyes staring at one from all sides of the room."

The car shot across the bridge and was speeding on its way toward the Bois when Robin ventured a glance behind. Through the little window in the back of the car he saw a big, swift-moving automobile not more than a quarter of a mile in their rear.

"Would you like to verify the report of my friend Gourou?" he asked, his voice quick with exhilaration. She knelt with one knee upon the seat and peered back along the road.

"There they are!" she cried. She threw the veil back over her hat as she resumed her seat in the corner. Her eyes were fairly dancing with excitement. The warm red lips were parted and she was breathing quickly. Suddenly she laid her hand over her heart

as if to check its lively thumping. "Isn't it splendid? We are being pursued — actually chased by the man-hunters of Paris! Oh, I was never so happy in my life. Isn't it great?"

"It is glorious!" he cried exultantly. "Shall I tell the chauffeur to hit it up a bit? Let's make it a real chase."

"Yes, do! We'll see if we can foil them, as they say in the books. Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if we were to — to — what do you call it? Give them the slip, isn't that it?"

"I'm game," said he, with enthusiasm. For a second or two they looked straight into each other's eyes and a message was exchanged that never could have been put into words. No doubt it was the flush of eager excitement that darkened their cheeks. In any case, it came swiftly and went as quickly, leaving them paler than before and vastly self-conscious. And after that brief, searching look they knew that they could never be as they were before the exchange. They were no longer strangers to each other, but shy comrades and filled with a delicious sense of wonder.

Robin gave hurried directions through the speaking tube to the attentive footman, and so explicit were these directions that the greatest excitement prevailed upon the decorous front seat of the car — first the footman looked back along the road, then the chauffeur, after which a thrill of excitement seemed to fairly race up and down their liveried backs. The car itself took a notion to quiver with the promise of joy

unrestrained. In less than a minute they were going more than a mile a minute over a short stretch of the Avenue de Longchamp. At the Porte de Hippodrome they slowed down and ran into the Bois, taking the first road to the left. In a few minutes they were scudding past Longchamp at a "fair clip" to quote R. Schmidt. Instead of diverging into the Allee de Longchamp, the car took a sharp turn into the Avenue de l'Hippodrome and, at the intersection, doubled back over the Allee de la Reine Marguerite, going almost to the Boulogne gate, where again it was sent Parisward over the Avenue de St. Cloud.

Miss Guile was in command of the flight. She called out the instructions to the driver and her knowledge of the intricate routes through the park stood them well in hand. Purposely she evaded the Cascades, circling the little pools by narrow, unfrequented roads, coming out at last to the Porte de la Muette, where they left the park and took to the Avenue Henri Martin. It was her design to avoid the customary routes to the heart of the city, and all would have gone well with them had not fate in the shape of two burly *sergents de ville* intervened at a time when success seemed most certain. It was quite clear to the pursued that the car containing their followers had been successfully eluded and was no doubt in the Champs Elysees by this time. For some time there had been a worried look in the Prince's eyes. Once he undertook to remonstrate with his fair companion.

"My dear Miss Guile, we'll land in jail if we keep

up this hair-raising speed. There wouldn't be any fun in that, you know."

She gave him a scornful look. "Are you afraid, Mr. Schmidt?"

"Not on my own account," said he, "but yours. I've heard that the new regulations are extremely rigid."

"Pooh! I'm not afraid of the police. They — why, what's the matter? Oh, goodness!"

The car had come to a somewhat abrupt stop. Two policemen, dismounted from their bicycles, formed an insurmountable obstruction. They were almost in the shade of the Trocadero.

"Do not be alarmed," whispered Robin to the fast paling girl, into whose eyes the most abject misery had leaped at the sight of the two officers. "Leave it to me. I can fix them all right. There's nothing to be worried about — well, *sergent*, what is it?"

The polite officers came up to the window with their little note-books.

"I regret, m'sieur, that we shall be obliged to conduct yourself and mademoiselle to the office of a magistrate. Under the new regulations set forth in the order of last May, motorists may be given a hearing at once. I regret to add that m'sieur has been exceeding the speed limit. A complaint came in but a few minutes ago from the Porte de la Muette and we have been ordered to intercept the car. You may follow us to the office of the magistrate, m'sieur. It will soon be over, mademoiselle."

"But we can explain —" she began nervously.

The *sergent* held up his hand. "It is not necessary to explain, mademoiselle. Too many motorists have explained in the past but that does not restore to life the people they have killed in the pursuit of pleasure. Paris is enforcing her laws."

"But, *sergent*, I alone am to blame for any violation of the law," said Robin suavely. "Surely it is only necessary that I should accompany you to the magistrate. The young lady is in no way responsible —"

"Alas, m'sieur," said the man firmly but as if he were quite broken-hearted, "it is not for me to disobey the law, even though you may do so. It is necessary for the lady to appear before the Judge, and it is our duty to convey her there. The new law explicitly says that all occupants of said car shall be subject to penalty under the law without reprieve or pardon!"

"Where are your witnesses?" demanded Robin.

The two men produced their watches and their notebooks, tapping them significantly.

"M'sieur will not think of denying that he has been running more rapidly than the law allows," said the second officer. "It will go harder with him if he should do so."

"I shall insist upon having an advocate to represent me before —"

"As you like, m'sieur," said the first officer curtly. "Proceed!" he uttered as a command to the chauf

feur, and forthwith mounted his wheel. A score of people had gathered round them by this time, and Miss Guile was crouching back in her corner. Her veil was down. In single file, so to speak, they started off for the office of the nearest magistrate appointed under the new law governing automobiles. A policeman pedaled ahead of the car and another followed.

"Isn't it dreadful?" whispered Miss Guile. "What do you think they will do to us? Oh, I am so sorry, Mr. Schmidt, to have dragged you into this horrid —"

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world," said he so earnestly that she sat up a little straighter and caught her breath. "After all, they will do no more than assess a fine against us. A hundred francs, perhaps. That is nothing."

"I am not so sure of that," said she gloomily. "My friends were saying only yesterday that the new law provides for imprisonment as well. Paris has constructed special prisons for motorists, and people are compelled to remain in them for days and weeks at a time. Oh, I hope —"

"I'll inquire of the footman," said Robin. "He will know." The footman, whose face was very long and serious, replied through the tube that very few violators escaped confinement in the "little prisons." He also said "Mon dieu" a half dozen times, and there was a movement of the driver's pallid lips that seemed to indicate a fervent echo.

"I shall telephone at once — to my friends," said

Miss Guile, a note of anger in her voice. "They are very powerful in Paris. We shall put those miserable wretches in their proper places. They —"

"We must not forget, Miss Guile, that we *were* breaking the law," said Robin, who was beginning to enjoy the discomfiture of this spoiled beauty, this girl whose word was a sort of law unto itself.

"It is perfect nonsense," she declared. "We did no harm. Goodness! What is this?"

Four or five policemen on wheels passed by the car, each with a forbidding glance through the windows.

"They are the boys we left behind us," paraphrased Robin soberly. "The park policemen. They've just caught us up, and, believe me, they look serious, too. I dare say we are in for it."

In a very few minutes the procession arrived at a low, formidable looking building on a narrow side street. The cavalcade of policemen dismounted and stood at attention while Mademoiselle and Monsieur got down from the car and followed a polite person in uniform through the doors. Whereupon the group of *sergents de ville* trooped in behind, bringing with them the neatly liveried servants with the golden letter L on their cuffs.

"I believe there is a jail back there," whispered the slim culprit, a quaver in her voice. She pointed down the long, narrow corridor at the end of which loomed a rather sinister looking door with thick bolt-heads studding its surface.

An instant later they were ushered into a fair-sized room on the left of the hall, where they were commanded to sit down. A lot of chairs stood about the room, filling it to the farthest corners, while at the extreme end was the Judge's bench.

"I insist on being permitted to telephone to friends — to my legal advisors,—" began Miss Guile, with praiseworthy firmness, only to be silenced by the attendant, who whispered shrilly that a trial was in progress, couldn't she see?

Two dejected young men were standing before the Judge, flanked by three *sergents de ville*. Robin and Miss Guile stared wide-eyed at their fellow criminals and tried to catch the low words spoken by the fat Magistrate. Once more they were ordered to sit down, this time not quite so politely, and they took seats in the darkest corner of the room, as far removed from justice as possible under the circumstances.

Presently a young man approached them. He was very nice looking and astonishingly cheerful. The hopes of the twain went up with a bound. His expression was so benign, so bland that they at once jumped to the conclusion that he was coming to tell them that they were free to go, that it had all been a stupid mistake. But they were wrong. He smilingly introduced himself as an advocate connected with the court by appointment and that he would be eternally grateful to them if they would tell him what he could do for them.

"I'd like to have a word in private with the Magistrate," said the Prince of Graustark eagerly.

"Impossible!" said the advocate, lifting his eyebrows and his smart little mustachios in an expression of extreme amazement. "It is imposs —" A sharp rapping on the Judge's desk reduced the remainder of the sentence to a delicate whisper —"ible, M'sieur."

"Will you conduct me to a telephone booth?" whispered Miss Guile, tearfully.

"Pray do not weep, Mademoiselle," implored the advocate, profoundly moved, but at the same time casting a calculating eye over the luckless pair.

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Robin. "We insist on having our own legal advisors here."

"The court will not delay the hearing, M'sieur," explained the young man. "Besides, the best legal advisor in Paris could do no more than to advise you to plead guilty. I at least can do that quite as ably as the best of them. No one ever pretends to defend a case in the automobile courts, M'sieur. It is a waste of time, and the court does not approve of wasting time. Perhaps you will feel more content if I introduce the assistant public prosecutor, who will explain the law. That is his only duty. He does not prosecute. There is no need. The *sergents* testify and that is all there is to the case."

"May I inquire what service you can be to us if the whole business is cut and dried like that?" asked Robin.

"Not so loud, M'sieur. As I said before, I can advise you in respect to your plea, and I can tell you how to present your statement to the court. I can caution you in many ways. Sometimes a prisoner, who is well-rehearsed, succeeds in affecting the honourable Magistrate nicely, and the punishment is not so severe."

"So you advise us to plead guilty as delicately as possible?"

"I shall not advise you, M'sieur, unless it pleases you to retain me as your counsellor. The fee is small. Ten francs. Inasmuch as the amount is charged against you in the supplemental costs, it seems foolish not to take advantage of what you are obliged to pay for in any event. You will have to pay my fee, so you may as well permit me to be of service to you."

"My only concern is over Mademoiselle," said the Prince. "You may send me to jail if you like, if you'll only —"

"Mon dieu! I am not the one who enjoys the distinguished honour of being permitted to send people to jail, but the Judge, M'sieur."

"It is ridiculous to submit this innocent young lady to the humiliation of —"

"It is not only ridiculous but criminal," said the advocate, with a magnificent bow. "But what is one to do when it is the law? Of late, the law is peculiarly sexless. And now here is where I come in. It is I who shall instruct you — both of you, Made-

moiselle — how to conduct yourselves before the Magistrate. Above all things, do not attempt to contradict a single statement of the police. Admit that all they say is true, even though they say that you have run over a child or an old woman with mortal results. It will go much easier with you. Exercise the gravest politeness and deference toward the honourable Magistrate and to every officer of the court. You are Americans, no doubt. The courts are prone to be severe with the Americans because they sometimes undertake to tell them how easy it is to get the right kind of justice in your wonderfully progressive United States. Be humble, contrite, submissive, for that is only justice to the court. If you have killed some one in your diversions, pray do not try to tell the magistrate that the idiot ought to have kept his eyes open. Another thing: do not inform the court that you require a lawyer. That is evidence of extreme culpability and he will consider you to be inexcusably guilty. Are you attending? Pray do not feel sorry for the two young men who are now being led away. See! They are weeping. It is as I thought. They are going to prison for — But that is their affair, not ours. I advised them as I am advising you, but they insisted on making a statement of their case. That was fatal, for it failed in many respects to corroborate the information supplied by the police. It —"

"What was the charge against them?" whispered Miss Guile, quaking. She had watched the exit of

the tearful young men, one of whom was sobbing bitterly, and a great fear possessed her.

"Of that, Mademoiselle, I am entirely ignorant, but they were unmistakably guilty of denying it, whatever it was."

"Are they going to prison?" she gasped.

"It is not that which causes them to weep so bitterly, but the knowledge that their names are to be posted on the bulletin boards in the Place de l'Opera, the Place de l'Concorde, the —"

"Good Lord!" gasped Robin. "Is *that* being done?"

"It is M'sieur, and the effect is marvellous. Three months ago the boards were filled with illustrious names; to-day there are but few to be found upon them. The people have discovered that the courts are in earnest. The law is obeyed as it never was before. The prisons were crowded to suffocation at one time; now they are almost empty. It is a good law. To-day a mother can wheel her baby carriage in the thickest of the traffic and run no risk of — Ah, but here is the assistant prosecutor coming. Permit me to further warn you that you will be placed under oath to tell the absolute truth. The prosecutor will ask but three questions of you: your age, your name and your place of residence. All of them you must answer truthfully, especially as to your names. If it is discovered that you have falsely given a name not your own, the lowest penalty is sixty days in prison, imposed afterwards in addition to the sen-

tence you will receive for violating the traffic laws. I have performed my duty as required by the commissioner. My fee is a fixed one, so you need not put your hand into your pocket, M'sieur. Good day, Mademoiselle — good day, M'sieur." He bowed profoundly and gave way to the impatient prosecutor, who had considerately held himself aloof while the final words were being uttered, albeit he glanced at his watch a couple of times.

"Come," he said, and he did not whisper; "let us be as expeditious as possible. Approach the court. It is —"

"See here," said Robin savagely, "this is too damned high-handed. Are we to have no chance to defend ourselves? We —"

"Just as you please, M'sieur," interrupted the prosecutor patiently. "It is nothing to me. I receive my fee in any event. If you care to defy the law in addition to what you have already done, it is not for me to object."

"Well, I insist on having —"

A thunderous pounding on the bench interrupted his hot-headed speech.

"Attend!" came in a sharp, uncompromising voice from the bench. "What is the delay? This is no time to think. All that should have been done before. Step forward! *Sergent*, see that the prisoners step forward."

Robin slipped his arm through Miss Guile's, expecting her to droop heavily upon it for support. To his

surprise she drew herself up, dis-engaged herself, and walked straight up to the bench, without fear or hesitation. It was Robin who needed an example of courage and fortitude, not she. The chauffeur and footman, shivering in their elegance, already stood before the bench.

"Will you be so kind as to raise your veil, Madam?" spake the court.

She promptly obeyed. He leaned forward with sudden interest. The prosecutor blinked and abruptly overcame the habitual inclination to appear bored. Such ravishing beauty had never before found its way into that little court-room. Adjacent moustaches were fingered somewhat convulsively by several *sergents de ville.*

"Ahem!" said the court, managing with some difficulty to regain his judicial form. "I am compelled by law, Mademoiselle, to warn you before you are placed under oath that the lowest penalty for giving a false name in answer to the charge to be brought against you is imprisonment for not less than sixty days. I repeat this warning to you, young man. Be sworn, if you please."

Robin experienced a queer sense of exultation, not at all lessened by the knowledge that he would be forced to reveal his own identity. Would she call herself Bedelia Guile or would she —"

"State your name, Mademoiselle," said the prosecutor.

CHAPTER XVI

THREE MESSAGES

Miss Guile lowered her head for an instant. Robin could see that her lip was quivering. A vast pity for her took possession of him and he was ashamed of what he now regarded as unexampled meanness of spirit on his own part. She lifted her shamed, pleading eyes to search his, as if expecting to find succour in their fearless depths. She found them gleaming with indignation, suddenly aroused, and was instantly apprehensive. There was a look in those eyes of his that seemed prophetic of dire results unless she checked the words that were rising to his lips. She shook her head quickly and, laying a hand upon his arm, turned to the waiting magistrate.

"My name is — Oh, is there no way to avoid the publicity —" she sighed miserably —"the publicity that —"

"I regret, Mademoiselle, that there is no alternative —" began the Judge, to be interrupted by the banging of the court-room door. He looked up, glaring at the offender with ominous eyes. The polite attendant from the outer corridor was advancing in great haste. He was not only in haste but vastly perturbed.

Despite the profound whack of the magistrate's

paper weight on the hollow top of the desk and the withering scowl that went with it, the attendant rushed forward, forgetting his manners, his habits and his power of speech in one complete surrender to nature. He thrust into the hand of the Judge a slip of paper, at the same time gasping something that might have been mistaken for an appeal for pardon but which more than likely was nothing of the sort.

"What is this?" demanded the Judge ferociously.

"Mon dieu!" replied the attendant, rolling his eyes heavenward.

The magistrate was impressed. He took up the slip of paper and read what was written thereon. Then he was guilty of a start. The next instant he had the prosecutor up beside him and then the advocate. Together they read the message from the outside and together they lifted three pairs of incredulous eyes to stare at the culprits below. There was a hurried consultation in excited whisperings, intermittent stares and far from magisterial blinkings.

Robin bent close to Bedelia's ear and whispered: "We must have killed some one, the way they are acting."

Her face was glowing with triumph. "No. Luck is with us, Mr. Schmidt. You'll see!"

The magistrate cleared his throat and beamed upon them in a most friendly fashion.

Robin grasped the situation in a flash. His own identity had been revealed to the Judge. It was not likely that the daughter of William Blithers could

create such lively interest in a French court of justice, so it *must* be that Gourou or Quinnox had come to the rescue. The court would not think of fining a prince of the royal blood, law or no law!

"M'sieur, Mademoiselle, will you be so good as to resume your seats? An extraordinary condition has arisen. I shall be obliged to investigate. The trial must be interrupted for a few minutes. Pardon the delay. I shall return as quickly as possible. *Sergent!* See that Mademoiselle and M'sieur are made comfortable."

He descended from the bench and hurried into the corridor, followed closely by the prosecutor and the advocate, both of whom almost trod on his heels. This may have been due to the fact that they were slighter men and more sprightly, but more than likely it was because they were unable to see where they were going for the excellent reason that they were not looking in that direction at all.

Policemen and attendants, mystified but impressed, set about to make the culprits comfortable. They hustled at least a half dozen roomy chairs out of an adjoining chamber; they procured palm-leaf fans and even proffered the improbable — ice-water! — after which they betook themselves to a remote corner and whispered excitedly at each other, all the while regarding the two prisoners with intense interest. Even the despairing footman and chauffeur exhibited unmistakable signs of life.

"I fancy my friends have heard of our plight, Mr.

Schmidt," she said, quite composedly. "We will be released in a very few minutes."

He smiled complacently. He could afford to let her believe that her friends and not his were performing a miracle.

"Your friends must be very powerful," he said.

"They are," said she, with considerable directness.

"Still, we are not out of the scrape yet, Miss Guile," he remarked, shaking his head. "It may be a flash in the pan."

"Oh, please don't say that," she cried in quick alarm. "I — I should die if — if we were to be sent to —"

"Listen to me," he broke in eagerly, for an inspiration had come to him. "There's no reason why you should suffer, in any event. Apparently I am a suspected person. I may just as well be a kidnapper as not. You must allow me to inform the Judge that I was abducting you, so that he —"

"How absurd!"

"I don't in the least mind. Besides, I too have powerful friends who will see that I am released in a day or two. You —"

"You cannot hope to convince the Judge that you were abducting me in my own automobile — or at least in one belonging to my friends, who are irreproachable. I am very much obliged to you for thinking of it, Mr. Schmidt, but it is out of the question. I couldn't allow you to do it in the first place,

and in the second I'm sure the court wouldn't believe you."

"It was I who suggested running away from those detectives," he protested.

"But I jumped at the chance, didn't I?" she whispered triumphantly. "I am even guiltier than thou. Can you ever forgive me for—"

"Hush!" he said, in a very low voice. His hand fell upon hers as it rested on the arm of the chair. They were in the shadows. She looked up quickly and their eyes met. After a moment hers fell, and she gently withdrew her hand from its place of bondage. "We are pals, Bedelia," he went on softly. "Pals never go back on each other. They sink or swim together, and they never stop to inquire the reason why. When it comes to a pinch, one or the other will sacrifice himself that his pal may be saved. I—"

"Please do not say anything more," she said, her eyes strangely serious and her voice vibrant with emotion. "Please!"

"I have a confession to make to you," he began, leaning still closer. "You have taken me on faith. You do not know who or what I am. I—"

She held up her hand, an engaging frown in her eyes. "Stop! This is no place for confessions. I will not listen to you. Save your confessions for the magistrate. Tell him the truth, Mr. Schmidt. I am content to wait."

He stared for an instant, perplexed. "See here,

Miss Guile,— Bedelia,— I've just got to tell you something that —"

"You may tell me at Interlaken," she interrupted, and she was now quite visibly agitated.

"At Interlaken? Then you mean to carry out your plan to spend —"

"Sh! Here they come. Now we shall see."

The magistrate and his companions re-entered the room at that instant, more noticeably excited than when they left it. The former, rubbing his hands together and smiling as he had never smiled before, approached the pair. It did not occur to him to resent the fact that they remained seated in his august presence.

"A lamentable mistake has been made," he said. "I regret that M'sieur and Mademoiselle have been subjected to so grave an indignity. Permit me to apologise for the misguided energy of our excellent *sergents*. They —"

"But we were exceeding the speed limit," said Robin comfortably, now that the danger was past. "The officers were acting within their rights."

"I know, I know," exclaimed the magistrate. "They are splendid fellows, all of them, and I beg of you to overlook their unfortunate — er — zealousness. Permit me to add that you are not guilty — I should say, that you are honourably discharged by this humble court. But wait! The *sergents* shall also apologise. Here! Attend. It devolves upon you —"

"Oh, I beg of you —" began Robin, but already the policemen, who had been listening open-mouthed to the agitated prosecutor, were bowing and scraping and muttering their apologies for enforcing a cruel and unjust law.

"And we are not obliged to give our names, *M'sieur le judge?*" cried Miss Guile gladly.

"Mademoiselle," said he, with a profound bow, "it is not necessary to acquaint me with something I already know. Permit me to again express the most unbounded regret that —"

"Oh, thank you," she cried. "We have had a really delightful experience. You owe us no apology, M'sieur. And now, may we depart?"

"Instantly! LaChance, conduct M'sieur and Mademoiselle into the fresh, sweet, open air and discover their car for them without delay. *Sergents*, remain behind. Let there be nothing to indicate that there has been detention. Mademoiselle, you have been merely making a philanthropic visit to our prison. There has been no arrest."

Robin and Miss Guile emerged from the low, forbidding door and stood side by side on the pavement looking up and down the street in search of the car. It was nowhere in sight. The chauffeur gasped with amazement — and alarm. He had left it standing directly in front of the door, and now it was gone.

"It is suggested, M'sieur," said the polite LaChance, "that you walk to the corner beyond, turn to the left and there you will find the car in plain

view. It was removed by two gentlemen soon after you condescended to honour us with a visit of inspection, and thereby you have escaped much unnecessary attention from the curious who always infest the vicinity of police offices." He saluted them gravely and returned at once to the corridor.

Following leisurely in the wake of the hurrying servants, Robin and Bedelia proceeded down the narrow street to the corner indicated. They were silent and preoccupied. After all, *who* was to be thanked for the timely escape, his god or hers?

And here it may be said that neither of them was ever to know who sent that brief effective message to the magistrate, nor were they ever to know the nature of its contents.

The men were examining the car when they came up. No one was near. There was no one to tell how it came to be there nor whither its unknown driver had gone. It stood close to the curb and the engine was throbbing, proof in itself that some one had but recently deserted his post as guardian.

"The obliging man-hunters," suggested Robin in reply to a low-voiced question.

"Or your guardian angel, the great Gourou!" she said, frowning slightly. "By the way, Mr. Schmidt, do you expect to be under surveillance during your stay at Interlaken?"

There was irony in her voice. "Not if I can help it," he said. "And you, Miss Guile? Is it possible that two of the best detectives in Paris are to continue

treading on your heels all the time you are in Europe? Must we go about with the uncomfortable feeling that some one is staring at us from behind, no matter where we are? Are we to be perpetually attended by the invisible? If so, I am afraid we will find it very embarrassing."

They were in the car now and proceeding at a snail's pace toward the Arc de Triomphe. Her eyes narrowed. He was sure that she clutched her slim fingers tightly although, for an excellent reason, he was not by way of knowing. He was rapturously watching those expressive eyes.

"I shall put a stop to this ridiculous espionage at once, Mr. Schmidt. These men shall be sent kiting — I mean, about their business before this day is over. I do not intend to be spied upon an instant longer."

"Still they may have been instruments of providence to-day," he reminded her. "Without them, we might now be languishing in jail and our spotless names posted in the Place de l'Opera. Bedelia Guile and Rex Schmidt, malefactors. What would your father say to that?"

She smiled — a ravishing smile, it was. His heart gave a stupendous jump. "He would say that it served me right," said she, and then: "But what difference can it possibly make to you, Mr. Schmidt, if the detectives continue to watch over me?"

"None," said he promptly. "I suppose they are used to almost anything in the way of human nature,

so if they don't mind, I'm sure I sha'n't. I haven't the slightest objection to being watched by detectives, if we can only keep other people from seeing us."

"Don't be silly," she cried. "And let me remind you while I think of it: You are not to call me Bedelia."

"Bedelia," he said deliberately.

She sighed. "I am afraid I have been mistaken in you," she said. He recalled Gourou's advice. Had he failed in the test? "But don't do it again."

"Now that I think of it," he said soberly, "you are not to call me Mr. Schmidt. Please bear that in mind, Bedelia."

"Thank you. I don't like the name. I'll call you —"

Just then the footman turned on the seat and excitedly pointed to a car that had swung into the boulevard from a side street.

"The man-hunters!" exclaimed Robin. "By jove, we didn't lose them after all."

"To the Ritz, Pierre," she cried out sharply. Once more she seemed perturbed and anxious.

"What are you going to call me?" he demanded, insistently.

"I haven't quite decided," she replied, and lapsed into moody silence.

Her nervousness increased as they sped down the Champs Elysees and across the Place de la Concorde. He thought that he understood the cause and presently sought to relieve her anxiety by suggesting that

she set him down somewhere along the Rue de Rivoli. She flushed painfully.

"Thank you, Mr. Schmidt, I — are you sure you will not mind?"

"May I ask what it is that you are afraid of, Miss Guile?" he inquired seriously.

She was lowering her veil. "I am not afraid, Mr. Schmidt," she said. "I am a very, very guilty person, that's all. I've done something I ought not to have done, and I'm — I'm ashamed. You don't consider me a bold, silly —"

"Good Lord, no!" he cried fervently.

"Then why do you call me Bedelia?" she asked, shaking her head.

"If you feel that way about it, I — I humbly implore you to overlook my freshness," he cried in despair.

"Will you get out here, Mr. Schmidt?" She pressed a button and the car swung alongside the curb.

"When am I to see you again?" he asked, holding out his hand. She gave it a firm, friendly grip and said:

"I am going to Switzerland the day after tomorrow. Good-bye."

In a sort of daze, he walked up the Rue Castiliogne to the Place Vendome. His heart was light and his eyes were shining with a flame that could have but one origin. He was no longer in doubt. He was in love. He had found the Golden Girl almost at the

end of his journey, and what cared he if she did turn out to be the daughter of old man Blithers? What cared he for *anything* but Bedelia? There would be a pretty howdy-do when he announced to his people that their Princess had been selected for them, whether or no, and there might be such a thing as banishment for himself. Even at that, he would be content, for Bedelia was proof against titles. If she loved him, it would be for himself. She would scorn the crown and mock the throne, and they would go away together and live happily ever afterward, as provided by the most exacting form of romance. And Blithers? What a joke it would be on Blithers if he gave up the throne!

As he approached the Ritz, a tall young man emerged from the entrance, stared at him for an instant, and then swung off at a rapid pace in the direction of the Rue de la Paix. The look he gave Robin was one of combined amazement and concern, and the tail end of it betrayed unmistakable annoyance, — or it might have been hatred. He looked over his shoulder once and found Robin staring after him. This time there could be no mistake. He was furious, but whether with Robin or himself there was no means of deciding from the standpoint of an observer. At any rate, he quickened his pace and soon disappeared.

He was the good-looking young fellow who had met her at the steamship landing, and it was quite obvious that he had been making investigations on his own account.

Robin permitted himself a sly grin as he sauntered into the hotel. He had given *that* fellow something to worry about, if he had accomplished nothing else. Then he found himself wondering if, by any chance, it could be the Scoville fellow. That would be a facer!

He found Quinnox and Dank awaiting him in the lobby. They were visibly excited.

"Did you observe the fellow who just went out?" inquired Robin, assuming a most casual manner.

"Yes," said both men in unison.

"I think we've got some interesting news concerning that very chap," added the Count, glancing around uneasily.

"Perhaps I may be able to anticipate it, Count," ventured Robin. "I've an idea he is young Scoville, the chap who is supposed to be in love with Miss Blithers — and *vice versa*," he concluded, with a chuckle.

"What have you heard?" demanded the Count in astonishment.

"Let's sit down," said Robin, at once convinced that he had stumbled upon an unwelcome truth.

They repaired to the garden and were lucky enough to find a table somewhat removed from the crowd of tea-drinkers. Robin began fanning himself with his broad straw-hat. He felt uncomfortably warm. Quinnox gravely extracted two or three bits of paper from his pocket, and spread them out in order before his sovereign.

"Read this one first," said he grimly.

It was a cablegram from their financial agents in New York City, and it said: "Mr. B. making a hurried trip to Paris. Just learned Scoville preceded Miss B. to Europe by fast steamer and has been seen with her in Paris. B. fears an elopement. Make sure papers are signed at once as such contingency might cause B. to change mind and withdraw if possible."

Robin looked up. "I think this may account for the two man-hunters," said he. His companions stared. "You will hear all about them from Gourou. We were followed this afternoon."

"Followed?" gasped Quinnox.

"Beautifully," said the Prince, with his brightest smile. "Detectives, you know. It was ripping."

"My God!" groaned the Count.

"I fancy you'll now agree with me that she is Miss Blithers," said Dank forlornly.

"Cheer up, Boske," cried Robin, slapping him on the shoulder. "You'll meet another fate before you're a month older. The world is absolutely crowded with girls."

"You can't crowd the world with one girl," said Dank, and it was quite evident from his expression that he believed the world contained no more than one.

"I had the feeling that evil would be the result of this foolish trip to-day," groaned Quinnox. "I should not have permitted you to —"

"The result is still in doubt," said Robin enigmatically. "And now, what comes next?"

"Read this one. It is from Mr. Blithers. I'll guarantee that you do not take this one so complacently."

He was right in his surmise. Robin ran his eye swiftly over the cablegram and then started up from his chair with a muttered imprecation.

"Sh!" cautioned the Count,— and just in time, for the young man was on the point of enlarging upon his original effort. "Calm yourself, Bobby, my lad. Try taking six or seven full, deep inhalations, and you'll find that it helps wonderfully as a preventive. It saves many a harsh word. I've —"

"You needn't caution me," murmured the Prince. "If I had the tongue of a pirate I couldn't begin to do justice to *this*," and he slapped his hand resoundingly upon the crumpled message from William W. Blithers.

The message had been sent by Mr. Blithers that morning, evidently just before the sailing of the fast French steamer on which he and his wife were crossing to Havre. It was directed to August Totten and read as follows:

"Tell our young friend to qualify statement to press at once. Announce reconsideration of hasty denial and admit engagement. This is imperative. I am not in mood for trifling. Have wired Paris papers that engagement is settled. Have also wired daughter. The sooner we get together on this the

better. Wait for my arrival in Paris." It was signed "W. B."

"There's Blitherskite methods for you," said Dank. "Speaking of pirates, he's the king of them all. Did you ever hear of such confounded insolence? The damned —"

"Wait a second, Dank," interrupted the Count. "There is still another delectable communication for you, Robin. It was directed to R. Schmidt and I took the liberty of opening it, as authorised. Read it."

This was one of the ordinary "*petits bleu*," dropped into the pneumatic tube letter-box at half-past two that afternoon, shortly before Robin ventured forth on his interesting expedition in quest of tea, and its contents were very crisp and to the point:

"Pay no attention to any word you may have received from my father. He cables a ridiculous command to me which I shall ignore. If you have received a similar message I implore you to disregard it altogether. Let's give each other a fighting chance."

It was signed "Maud Blithers."

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

Mr. Blithers received a marconigram from the *Jupiter* when the ship was three days out from New York. It was terse but sufficient.

"Have just had a glimpse of Prince Charming. He is very good-looking. Love to mother. Maud."

He had barely settled into a state of complete satisfaction with himself over the successful inauguration of a shrewd campaign to get the better of the recalcitrant Maud and the incomprehensible Robin, when he was thrown into a panic by the discovery that young Chandler Scoville had sailed for Europe two days ahead of Maud and her elderly companion. The gratification of knowing that the two young people had sailed away on the same vessel was not in the least minimised by Maud's declaration that she intended to remain in her cabin all the way across in order to avoid recognition, for he knew her too well to believe it possible that she could stay out of sight for any length of time, fair weather or foul. He even made a definite wager with his wife that the two would become acquainted before they were half-way across the Atlantic, and he made a bet with himself that nature would do the rest. And now here came the stagger-

ing suspicion that Scoville's hasty departure was the result of a pre-arranged plan between him and Maud, and that, after all, the silly girl might spoil everything by marrying the confounded rascal before he could do anything to prevent the catastrophe.

He even tried to engineer a scheme whereby young Scoville might be arrested on landing and detained on one pretext or another until he could reach Europe and put an end to the fellow's vain-glorious conniving.

But after consulting with his lawyers he abandoned the plan because they succeeded in proving to him that Maud certainly would marry the fellow if she had the least ground for believing that he was being oppressed on her account. The cables were kept very busy, however, for the next twenty-four hours, and it is certain that Scoville was a marked man from the moment he landed.

Newspaper reporters camped on the trail of Mr. Blithers. He very obligingly admitted that there was something in the report that his daughter was to marry the Prince of Graustark, although he couldn't say anything definite at the time. It wouldn't be fair to the parties concerned, he explained. He gave away a great many boxes of cigars, and not a few of the more sagacious reporters succeeded in getting at least three boxes by interviewing him on as many separate occasions without being detected in the act of repeating. Then came the disgusting denials in Paris by his daughter and the ungrateful Prince. This was

too much. He couldn't understand such unfilial behaviour on the part of one, and he certainly couldn't forgive the ingratitude of the other.

Instead of waiting until Saturday to sail, he changed ships and left New York on Friday, thereby gaining nothing by the move except relief from the newspapers, for it appears that he gave up a five day boat for one that could not do it under six. Still he was in active pursuit, which was a great deal better than sitting in New York twiddling his thumbs or looking at his watch and berating the pernicious hours that stood between him and Saturday noon.

"There will be something doing in Europe the day I land there, Lou," he said to his wife as they stood on deck and watched the Statue of Liberty glide swiftly back toward Manhattan Island. "I've got all the strings working smoothly. We've got Groostock where it can't peep any louder than a freshly hatched chicken, and we'll soon bring Maud to her senses. I tell you, Lou, there is nothing that makes a girl forget her lofty ideals so quickly as the chance to go shopping for princess gowns. She's seen the prince and I'll bet she won't be so stubborn as she was before. And if he has had a good, square look at her, — if he's had a chance to gaze into those eyes of hers, — why, I — well, I leave it to you. He can't help getting off his high horse, can he?"

Mrs. Blithers favoured him with a smile. It was acknowledged that Maud was the living image of what her mother had been at the age of twenty.

"I hope the child hasn't made any silly promise to Channie Scoville," she sighed.

"I've been thinking of that, Lou," said he, wiping his brow, "and I've come to one conclusion: Scoville can be bought off. He's as poor as Job and half a million will look like the Bank of England to him. I'll —"

"You are not to attempt anything of the kind, Will," she cried emphatically. "He would laugh in your face, poor as he is. He comes from one of the best families in New York and —"

"And I don't know where the best families need money any more than they do in New York," he interrupted irritably. "'Gad, if the worst families need it as badly as they do, what must be the needs of the best? You leave it to me. It may be possible to insult him with a half million, so if he feels that way about it I'll apologise to him again with another half million. You'll see that he won't be capable of resenting two insults in succession. He'll —"

"He isn't a fool," said she significantly.

"He'd be a fool if he refused to take —"

"Are you losing your senses, Will?" she cried impatiently. "Why should he accept a million to give up Maud, when he can be sure of fifty times that much if he marries her?"

"But I'll cut Maud off with a dollar if she marries him, so help me Moses!" exclaimed Mr. Blithers, but he went a little pale just the same. "That will fix him!"

"You are talking nonsense," said she sharply. He put his fingers to his ears somewhat earlier than usual, and she turned away with a tantalising laugh. "I'm going inside," and inside she went. When he followed a few minutes later he was uncommonly meek.

"At any rate," he said, seating himself on the edge of a chair in her parlour, "I guess those cablegrams this morning will make 'em think twice before they go on denying things in the newspapers."

"Maud will pay no attention to your cablegram, and, if I am any judge of human nature, the Prince will laugh himself sick over the one you sent to Count Quinnox. I told you not to send them. You are not dealing with Wall Street. You are dealing with a girl and a boy who appear to have minds of their own."

He ventured a superior sniff. "I guess you don't know as much about Wall Street as you think you do."

"I only know that it puts its tail between its legs and howls every time some one points a finger at it," she observed scornfully.

"Now let's be sensible, Lou," he said, sitting back a little further in the chair, relieved to find that she was at least willing to tolerate his presence,— a matter on which he was in some doubt when he entered the room. There were times when he was not quite certain whether he or she was the brains of the family. "We'll probably have a wireless from Maud before long. Then we'll have something tangible to discuss.

By the way, did I tell you that I've ordered some Dutch architects from Berlin to go —"

"The Dutch are from Holland," she said wearily.

"— to go over to Growstock and give me a complete estimate on repairing and remodelling the royal castle? I dare say we'll have to do a good deal to the place. It's several hundred years old and must require a lot of conveniences. Such as bath-rooms, electric lights, steam heating appar —"

"Better make haste slowly, Will," she said, and he ought to have been warned by the light in her eye. "You are taking a great deal for granted, aren't you?"

"It's got to be fixed up some time, so we might just as well do it in the beginning," said he, failing utterly to grasp her meaning. "Probably needs refurnishing from top to bottom, too, and a new roof. I never saw a ruin yet that didn't leak. Remember those castles on the Rhine? Will you ever forget how wet we got the day we went through the one at —"

"They were abandoned, tumble-down castles," she reminded him.

"There isn't a castle in Europe that's any good in a rain-storm," he proclaimed. "A mortgage can't keep out the rain and that's what every one of 'em is covered with. Why old man Quiddox himself told me that their castle had been shot to pieces in one of the revolutions and —"

"It is time you informed yourself about the coun-

try you are trying to annex to the Blithers estate," she said sarcastically. "I can assist you to some extent if you will be good enough to listen. In the first place, the royal castle at Edelweiss is one of the most substantial in the world. It has not been allowed to fall into decay. In fact, it is inhabitated from top to bottom by members of the royal household and the court, and I fancy they are not the sort of people who take kindly to a wetting. It is not a ruin, Will, such as you have been permitted to visit, but a magnificent building with all of the modern improvements. The only wettings that the inmates sustain are of a daily character and due entirely to voluntary association with porcelain bath-tubs and nickle-plated showers, and they never get anything wet but their skins. As for the furnishings, I can assure you that the entire Blithers fortune could not replace them if they were to be destroyed by fire or pillage. They are priceless and they are unique. I have read that the hangings in the bed-chamber of the late Princess Yctive are the most wonderful in the whole world. The throne chair in the great audience chamber is of solid gold and weighs nearly three thousand pounds. It is studded with diamonds, rubies —"

"Great Scott, Lou, where did you learn all this?" he gasped, his eyes bulging.

"— emeralds and other precious stones. There is one huge carpet in the royal drawing-room that the Czar of Russia is said to have offered one hundred

thousand pounds for and the offer was scorned. The park surrounding the castle is said to be beautiful beyond the power of description. The —"

"I asked you where you got all this information. Can't you answer me?"

"I obtained all this and a great deal more from a lady who spent a year or two inside the castle walls. I refer to Mrs. Truxton King, who might have told you as much if you had possessed the intelligence to inquire."

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Mr. Blithers, going back to his buoyant boyhood days for an adequate expression. "What a wonder you are, Lou. But that's the woman of it, always getting at the inside of a thing while a man is standing around looking at the outside. Say, but won't it make a wonderful home for you and me to spend a peaceful old age in when we get ready to lay aside the —"

He stopped short, for she had arisen and was standing over him with a quivering forefinger levelled at his nose,— and not more than six inches away from it, — her handsome eyes flashing with fury.

"You may walk in where angels fear to tread, but you will walk alone, Will Blithers. I shall not be with you, and you may as well understand it now. I've told you a hundred times that money isn't everything, and it is as cheap as dirt when you put it alongside of tradition, honour, pride and loyalty. Those Graustarkians would take you by the nape of the neck and march you out of their castle so quick that your head

would swim. You may be able to buy their prince for Maudie to exhibit around the country, but you can't buy the intelligence of the people. They won't have you at any price and they won't have me, so there is the situation in a nutshell. They will hate Maudie, of course, but they will endure her for obvious reasons. They may even come to love and respect her in the end, for she is worthy. But as for you and me, William,— with all our money,— we will find every hand against us — even the hand of our daughter, I prophesy. I am not saying that I would regret seeing Maud the Princess of Graustark — far from it. But I do say that you and I will be expected to know our places. If you attempt to spend your declining years in the castle at Edelweiss you will find them reduced to days, and short ones at that. The people of Graustark will see to it that you die before your time."

"Bosh!" said Mr. Blithers. "Mind if I smoke?" He took out a cigar and began searching for matches.

"No," she said, "I don't mind. It is a sign that you need something to steady your nerves. I know you, Will Blithers. You don't want to smoke. You want to gain a few minutes of time, that's all."

He lit a cigar. "Right you are," was his unexpected admission. "I wonder if you really have the right idea about this business. What objection could any one have to a poor, tired old man sitting in front of his daughter's fireside and — and playing with her kiddies? It seems to me that —"

"You will never be a tired old man, that's the trouble," she said, instantly touched.

"Oh, yes, I will," said he slowly. "I'm rather looking forward to it, too."

"It will be much nicer to have the kiddies come to your own fireside, Will. I used to enjoy nothing better than going to spend a few days with my grandfather."

"But what's the use of going to all this trouble and expense if we are not to enjoy some of the fruits?" he protested, making a determined stand. "If these people can't be grateful to the man who helps 'em out in their time of trouble,— and who goes out of his way to present 'em with a bright, capable posterity, — I'd like to know what in thunder gratitude really means."

"Oh, there isn't such a thing as gratitude," she said. "Obligation, yes,— and ingratitude most certainly, but gratitude,— no. You are in a position to know that gratitude doesn't exist. Are you forgetting the private advices we already have had from Graustark? Does it indicate that the people are grateful? There are moments when I fear that we are actually placing Maud's life in peril, and I have had some wretched dreams. They do not want her. They speak of exile for the Prince if he marries her. And now I repeat what I have said before: — the people of Graustark must have an opportunity to see and become acquainted with Maud before the marriage is definitely arranged. I will not have my

daughter cast into a den of lions, Will,— for that is what it may amount to. The people will adore her, they will welcome her with open arms if they are given the chance. But they will have none of her if she is forced upon them in the way you propose."

"I'll — I'll think it over," said Mr. Blithers, and then discovered that his cigar had gone out. "I think I'll go on deck and smoke, Lou. Makes it stuffy in here. We'll lunch in the restaurant at half-past one, eh?"

"Think hard, Will," she recommended, with a smile.

"I'll do that," he said, "but there's nothing on earth that can alter my determination to make Maud the Princess of Groostork. *That's* settled."

"Graustark, Will."

"Well, whatever it is," said he, and departed.

He did think hard, but not so much about a regal home for aged people as about Channie Scoville who had now become a positive menace to all of his well-ordered and costly plans. The principal subject for thought just now was not Graustark but this conniving young gentleman who stood ready to make a terrible mess of posterity. Mr. Blithers was sufficiently fair-minded to concede that the fellow was good-looking, well-bred and clever, just the sort of chap that any girl might fall in love with like a shot. As a matter of fact, he once had admired Scoville, but that was before he came to look upon him as a menace. He would make a capital husband for any girl in the

world, except Maud. He could say that much for him, without reserve.

He thought hard until half-past one and then went to the wireless office, where he wrote out a message in cipher and directed the operator to waste no time in relaying it to his offices in Paris. His wife was right. It would be the height of folly to offer Scoville money and it would be even worse to inspire the temporary imprisonment of the young man.

But there was a splendid alternative. He could manage to have his own daughter abducted,— chaperon included,— and held for ransom!

The more he thought of it the better it seemed to him, and so he sent a cipher message that was destined to throw his Paris managers into a state of agitation that cannot possibly be measured by words. In brief, he instructed them to engage a few peaceable, trustworthy and positively respectable gentlemen,— he was particularly exacting on the score of gentility,— with orders to abduct the young lady and hold her in restraint until he arrived and arranged for her liberation! They were to do the deed without making any fuss about it, but at the same time they were to do it effectually.

He had the foresight to suggest that the job should be undertaken by the very detective agency he had employed to shadow young Scoville and also to keep an eye on Maud. Naturally, she was never to know the truth about the matter. She was to believe that her father came up with a huge sum in the shape of ran-

som, no questions asked. He also remembered in time and added the imperative command that she was to be confined in clean, comfortable quarters and given the best of nourishment. But, above all else, it was to be managed in a decidedly realistic way, for Maud was a keen-witted creature who would see through the smallest crack in the conspiracy if there was a single false movement on the part of the plotters. It is also worthy of mention that Mrs. Blithers was never — *decidedly never* — to know the truth about the matter.

He went in to luncheon in a very amiable, even docile frame of mind.

"I've thought the matter over, Lou," he said, "and I guess you are right, after all. We will make all the repairs necessary, but we won't consider living in it ourselves. We'll return good for evil and live in a hotel when we go to visit the royal family. As for —"

"I meant that you were to think hard before attempting to force Maud upon Prince Robin's subjects without preparing them for the —"

"I thought of that, too," he interrupted cheerfully. "I'm not going to cast my only child into the den of lions, so that's the end of it. Have you given the order, my dear?"

"No," she said; "for I knew you would change it when you came in."

Late that evening he had a reply from his Paris managers. They inquired if he was responsible for the message they had received. It was a ticklish job

and they wanted to be sure that the message was genuine. He wired back that he was the sender and to go ahead. The next morning they notified him that his instructions would be carried out as expeditiously as possible.

He displayed such a beaming countenance all that day that his wife finally demanded an explanation. It wasn't like him to beam when he was worried about anything, and she wanted to know what had come over him.

"It's the sea-air, Lou," he exclaimed glibly. "It always makes me feel like a fighting-cock. I—"

"Rubbish! You detest the sea-air. It makes you feel like fighting, I grant, but not like a fighting-cock."

"There you go, trying to tell me how I feel. I've never known any one like you, Lou. I can't say a word that—"

"Have you had any news from Maud?" she broke in suspiciously.

"Not a word," said he.

"What have you done to Channie Scoville?" she questioned, fixing him with an accusing eye.

"Not a thing," said he.

"Then, what is it?"

"You won't believe me if I tell you," said he warily.

"Yes, I will."

"No, you won't."

"Tell me this instant why you've been grinning like a Cheshire cat all day."

"It's the sea-air," said he, and then: "I said you wouldn't believe me, didn't I?"

"Do you think I'm a fool, Will Blithers?" she flashed, and did not wait for an answer. He chuckled to himself as she swept imperiously out of sight around a corner of the deck-building.

He was up bright and early the next morning, tingling with anticipation. There ought to be word from Paris before noon, and it might come earlier. He kept pretty close to the wireless operator's office, and was particularly attentive to the spitting crackle of the instrument.

About eleven o'clock an incomprehensibly long message began to rattle out of the air. He contained himself in patience for the matter of half an hour or longer, and then, as the clatter continued without cessation, he got up and made his way to the door of the operator's office.

"What is it? The history of England?" he demanded sarcastically.

"Message for you, Mr. Blithers. It's a long one and I'm having a hard time picking it up. Everybody seems to be talking at once. Do you want the baseball scores, Mr. Blithers?"

"Not unless they come in cipher," said Mr. Blithers acidly.

"Some of 'em do. Six to nothing in favor of the

Giants, two to nothing — Here we are at last. I've picked up the *Mauretania* again. She's relaying."

Mr. Blithers sat down on the steps and looked at his watch. It would be five o'clock in Paris. He wondered if they were giving Maud her afternoon tea, and then choked up with a sudden pity for the terrified captive. It was all he could do to keep from jumping up and ordering the operator to drop everything and take a message countermanding his inhuman instructions to those asses in Paris. Tears gushed from his eyes. He brushed them away angrily and tried to convince himself that it served Maud right for being so obstinate. Still the tears came. The corners of his mouth drooped and his chin began to quiver. It was too much! The poor child was —

But just then the operator sat back with a sigh of relief, mopped his brow, and said:

"Good thing you're a rich man, Mr. Blithers. It came collect and —"

"Never mind," blurted Mr. Blithers. "Hand it over."

There were four sheets of writing at some outlandish price per word, but what cared he? He wanted to get back to his stateroom and his cipher code as quickly — but his eyes almost started from his head as he took in the name at the bottom of the message. It was "Maud."

He did not require the cipher book. A fourth reader child could have read the message without a

halt. Maud had taken his request literally. He had asked her to send him a nice long message, but he did not expect her to make a four-page letter of it. She was paying him out with a vengeance!

He took the precaution to read it before handing it over to his wife, to whom it was addressed in conjunction with himself:

"Dear father and mother," it began—(and he looked at the date line again to make sure it was from Paris)—"in reply to your esteemed favour of the nineteenth, or possibly the twentieth, I beg to inform you that I arrived safely in Paris as per schedule. Regarding the voyage, it was delightful. We had one or two rough days. The rest of the time it was perfectly heavenly. I met two or three interesting and amusing people on board and they made the time pass most agreeably. I think I wired you that I had a glimpse of a certain person. On my arrival in Paris I was met at the station by friends and taken at once to the small, exclusive hotel where they are stopping for the summer. It is so small and exclusive that I'm sure you have never heard of it. I may as well tell you that I have seen Channie,— you know who I mean, — Chandler Scoville, and he has been very nice to me. Concerning your suggestion that I reconsider the statement issued to the press, I beg to state that I don't see any sense in taking the world into my confidence any farther than it has been taken already, if that is grammatically correct. I have also sent word to a certain person that he is not to pay any attention

to the report that we are likely to change our minds in order to help out the greedy newspapers who don't appear to know when they have had enough. I hope that the voyage will benefit both of you as much as it did me. If I felt any better than I do now I'd call for the police as a precaution. Let me suggest that you try the chicken a la Bombardier in the Ritz restaurant. I found it delicious. I daresay they serve it as nicely on your ship as they do on the *Jupiter*. as the management is the same. Of course one never can tell about chefs. My plans are a trifle indefinite. I may leave here at any moment. It is very hot and muggy and nearly every one is skipping off to the mountains or seashore. If I should happen to be away from Paris when you arrive don't worry about me. I shall be all right and in safe hands. I will let you know where I am just as soon as I get settled somewhere. I must go where it is quiet and peaceful. I am so distressed over what has occurred that I don't feel as though I could ever be seen in public again without a thick veil and a pair of goggles. I have plenty of money for immediate use, but you might deposit something to my credit at the Credit Lyonnais as I haven't the least idea how long I shall stay over here. Miranda is well and is taking good care of me. She seldom lets me out of her sight if that is any comfort to you. I hope you will forgive the brevity of this communication and believe me when I say that it is not lack of love for you both that curtails its length but the abominably hot weather. With

endless love from your devoted daughter — Maud."

The tears had dried in Mr. Blithers' eyes but he wiped them time and again as he read this amazing letter,— this staggering exhibition of prodigality. He swore a little at first, but toward the end even that prerogative failed him. He set out in quest of his wife. Not that he expected her to say any more than he had said, but that he wanted her to see at a glance what kind of a child she had brought into the world and to forever hold her peace in future when he undertook to speak his mind.

He could not understand why his wife laughed softly to herself as she read, and he looked on in simple amazement when she deliberately undertook to count the words. She counted them in a whisper and he couldn't stand it. He went down where the children were shrieking over a game of quoits and felt singularly peaceful and undisturbed.

It was nearly bed-time before word came from his managers in Paris. Bed-time had no meaning for him after he had worked out the message by the code. It is true that he observed a life-long custom and went to bed, but he did not do it for the purpose of going to sleep.

"Your daughter has disappeared from Paris. All efforts to locate her have failed. Friends say she left ostensibly for the Pyrenees but inquiries at stations and along line fail to reveal trace of her. Scoville still here and apparently in the dark. He is being watched. Her companion and maid left with her last

night. Prince of Graustark and party left for Edelweiss to-day."

So read the message from Paris.

CHAPTER XVIII

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

One usually has breakfast on the porch of the Hotel Schweizerhof at Interlaken. It is not the most fashionable hostelry in the quaint little town at the head of the Lake of Thun, but it is of an excellent character, and the rolls and honey to be had with one's breakfast can not be surpassed in the Bernese Oberland. Straight ahead lies one of the most magnificent prospects in all the world: an unobstructed view of the snow-thatched Jungfrau, miles away, gleaming white and jagged against an azure sky, suggesting warmth instead of chill, grandeur instead of terror. Looking up the valley one might be led to say that an hour's ramble would take him to the crest of that shining peak, and yet some men have made a life's journey of it. Others have turned back in time.

One has a whiff of fragrant woodlands and serene hay-cocks, a breath of cool air from the Jungfrau's snows, a sniff of delectable bacon and toast — and a zest for breakfast. And one sets about it with interest, with the breakfast of the next day as a thing to look forward to.

R. Schmidt sat facing the dejected Boske Dank. His eyes were dancing with the joy of living, and nothing better can be said of a man's character than that

he is gay and happy at breakfast-time. He who wakes up, refreshed and buoyant, and eager for the day's adventure, is indeed a child of nature. He will never grow old and crabbed; he will grip the hand of death when the time comes with the unconquered zeal that makes the grim reaper despise himself for the advantage he takes of youth.

"Well, here we are and in spite of that, where are we?" said Dank, who saw nothing beautiful in the smile of any early morn. "I mean to say, what have we to show for our pains? We sneak into this God-forsaken hamlet, surrounded on all sides by abominations in the shape of tourists, and at the end of twenty-four hours we discover that the fair Miss Guile has played us a shabby trick. I daresay she is laughing herself sick over the whole business."

"Which is more than you can say for yourself, Boske," said Robin blithely. "Brace up! All is not lost. We'll wait here a day or two longer and then — well, I don't know what we'll do then."

"She never intended to come here at all," said Dank, filled with resentment. "It was a trick to get rid of us. She —"

"Be honest, old chap and say that it was a trick to get rid of *me*. Us is entirely too plural. But I haven't lost heart. She'll turn up yet."

"Count Quinnox is in despair over this extraordinary whim of yours, highness. He is really ill in bed this morning. I —"

"I'll run up and see him after breakfast," cried the

Prince, genuinely concerned. "I'm sorry he is taking it so seriously."

"He feels that we should be at home instead of dawdling about the —"

"That reminds me, Dank," broke in the Prince, fresh happiness in his smile; "I've decided that home is the place for you and the Count — and Gourou too. I'm perfectly able to take care of myself,— with some assistance from Hobbs,— and I don't see any necessity for you three to remain with me any longer. I'll tell the Count that you all may start for Vienna to-night. You connect with the Orient express at —"

"Are you mad, highness?" cried Dank, startled out of his dejection. "What you speak of is impossible — utterly impossible. We cannot leave you. We were delegated to escort you —"

"I understand all of that perfectly, Dank," interrupted Robin, suddenly embarrassed, "but don't you see how infernally awkward it will be for me if Miss Guile does appear, according to plan? She will find me body-guarded, so to speak, by three surly, scowling individuals whose presence I cannot explain to save my soul, unless I tell the truth, and I'm not yet ready to do that. Can't you see what I mean? How am I to explain the three of you? A hawk-eyed triumvirate that camps on my trail from morn till night and refuses to budge! She'll suspect something, old fellow, and — well, I certainly will feel more comfortable if I'm not watched for the next few days."

"That's the point, highness. You've just got to

be watched for the next few days. We would never dare to show our faces in Graustark again if we allowed anything to happen to you while you are under our care. You are a sacred charge. We must return you to Graustark as — er — inviolate as when you departed. We — we couldn't think of subjecting you to the peril of a — that is to say, it might prove fatal. Graustark, in that event, would be justified in hanging two of her foremost citizens and yours truly from gibbets designed especially for the blackest of traitors."

"I see, Dank. If I find happiness, you are almost sure to find disgrace and death, eh? It doesn't seem a fair division, does it? I suppose you all feel that the worst thing that can possibly happen is for me to find happiness."

"If I were the Prince of Graustark I should first think of the happiness of my subjects. I would not offend."

"Well put, Boske, but fortunately you are not the Prince. I sometimes wish that you were. It would relieve me of a tremendous responsibility. I am not mean enough, however, to wish a crown upon you, old fellow. You are lucky to be who and what you are. No one cares what you do, so long as you are honourable about it. With me it is different. I have to be watched day and night in order to be kept from doing what all the rest of the world looks upon as honourable."

"I implore you, highness, to give up this mad enterprise and return to your people as —"

"There is only one person in the world who can stop me now, Dank."

"And she isn't likely to do so, worse luck," was the other's complaint.

"When she tells me to go about my business, I'll go, but not until then. Don't you like honey, Dank?"

"No," said Dank savagely. "I hate it." He leaned back in his chair and glowered upon the innocent, placid Jungfrau. The Prince ate in silence. "May I be permitted a question, highness?"

"All you like, Boske. You are my best friend. Go ahead."

"Did you see Miss Guile after that visit to St. Cloud — and to the police station?"

"No. Evidently she was frightened out of her boots by the Hawkshaws. I don't blame her, do you?"

"And you've had no word from her?"

"None. Now you are going to ask what reason I have for believing that she will come to Interlaken. Well, I can't answer that question. I think she'll come, that's all."

"Do you think she is in love with you?"

"Ah, my dear fellow, you are asking me to answer my own prayer," said Robin, without a sign of resentment in his manner. "I'm praying that she isn't altogether indifferent. By the way, it is my turn to ask questions. Are you still in love with her?"

"I am proud to say that you are more in my prayers that she," said Dank, with a profound sigh. "Nothing could please me more than to be the one to save my prince from disaster, even if it meant the sacrifice of self. My only prayer is that you may be spared, sir, and I taken in your place."

"That was a neat answer, 'pon my soul," cried the Prince admiringly. "You — Hello, who is this approaching? It is no other than the great Gourou himself, the king of sleuths, as they say in the books I used to read. Good morning, Baron."

The sharp-visaged little Minister of Police came up to the table and fixed an accusing eye upon his sovereign,— the literal truth, for he had the other eye closed in a protracted wink.

"I regret to inform your majesty that the enemy is upon us," he said. "I fear that our retreat is cut off. Nothing remains save —"

"She has arrived?" cried the Prince eagerly.

"She has," said the Baron. "Bag and baggage, and armed to the eyes. Each eye is a gatling-gun, each lip a lunette behind which lies an unconquerable legion of smiles and rows of ivory bayonets, each ear a hardy spy, and every nut-brown strand a covetous dastard on the warpath not for a scalp but for a crown. Napoleon was never so well prepared for battle as she, nor Troy so firmly fortified. Yes, highness, the foe is at our gates. We must to arms!"

"Where is she?" demanded Robin, unimpressed by this glowing panegyric.

"At this instant, sir, I fancy she is rallying her forces in the very face of a helpless mirror. In other words, she is preparing for the fray. She is dressing."

"The devil! How dare you pry into the secret —"

"Abhorrent thought! I deduce, nothing more. Her maid loses herself in the halls while attempting to respond to the call for re-inforcements. She accosts a gentleman of whom she inquires the way The gentleman informs her she is on the third, not the second *etage*, and she scurries away simpering, but not before confiding to me — the aforesaid gentleman — that her mistress will give her fits for being late with her hair, whatever that may signify. So, you see, I do not stoop to keyholes but put my wits to work instead."

"When did she arrive?"

"She came last night via Milan."

"From Milan?" cried Robin, astonished.

"A roundabout way, I'll admit," said the Baron, drily, "and tortuous in these hot days, but admirably suited to a purpose. I should say that she was bent on throwing some one off the track."

"And yet she came!" cried the Prince, in exultation. "She wanted to come, after all, now didn't she, Dank?" He gave the lieutenant a look of triumph.

"She is more dangerous than I thought," said the guardsman mournfully.

"Sit down, Baron," commanded the Prince. "I want to lay down the law to all of you. You three

will have to move on to Graustark and leave me to look out for myself. I will not have Miss Guile —"

"No!" exclaimed the Baron, with unusual vehemence. "I expected you to propose something of the kind, and I am obliged to confess to you that we have discussed the contingency in advance. We will not leave you. That is final. You may depose us, exile us, curse us or anything you like, but still we shall remain true to the duty we owe to our country. We stay here, Prince Robin, just so long as you are content to remain."

Robin's face was very red. "You shame me, Baron," he said simply. "I am sorry that I spoke as I did. You are my friends, my loyal friends, and I would have humbled you in the eyes of my people. I beg your pardon, and yours, Boske. After all, I am only a prince and a prince is dependent on the loyalty of such as you. I take back all that I said."

The Baron laid a kindly hand on the young man's shoulder. "I was rough, highness, in my speech just now, but you will understand that I was moved to —"

"I know, Baron. It was the only way to fetch me up sharp. No apology is required. God bless you."

"Now I have a suggestion of my own to offer," said the Baron, taking a seat at the end of the table. "I confess that Miss Guile may not be favourably impressed by the constant attendance of three able-bodied nurses, and, as she happens to be no fool, it is reasonably certain that she will grasp the significance of our assiduity. Now I propose that the

Count, Dank and myself efface ourselves as completely as possible during the rest of our enforced stay in Interlaken. I propose that we take quarters in another hotel and leave you and Hobbs to the tender mercies of the enemy. It seems to me that —"

"Good!" cried Robin. "That's the ticket! I quite agree to that, Baron."

Dank was prepared to object but a dark look from Gourou silenced him. "I've talked it over with the Count and he acquiesces," went on the Baron. "We recognise the futility of trying to induce you to leave at once for Graustark, and we are now content to trust Providence to watch over and protect you against a foe whose motives may in time become transparent, even to the blind."

The irony in the remark was not lost on Robin. He flushed angrily but held his tongue.

Ten o'clock found the three gentlemen,— so classified by Hobbs,— out of the Schweizerhof and arranging for accommodations at the Regina Hotel Jungfraublick, perched on an eminence overlooking the valley and some distance removed from the temporary abode of the Prince. Their departure from the hotel in the Hoheweg was accomplished without detection by Miss Guile or her friends, and, to all intents and purposes, Robin was alone and unattended when he sat down on the porch near the telescope to await the first appearance of the enchanting foe. He was somewhat puzzled by the strange submissiveness of his companions. Deep down in his mind lurked the dis-

quieting suspicion that they were conniving to get the better of the lovely temptress by some sly and secret bit of strategy. What was back of the wily Baron's motive? Why were they now content to let him take the bit in his teeth and run wherever he would? What had become of their anxiety, their eagerness to drag him off to Graustark by the first train? There was food for reflection in the tranquil capitulation of the defenders. Were they acting under fresh instructions from Edelweiss? Had the Prime Minister directed them to put no further obstacle in front of the great Blithers invasion? Or — and he scowled darkly at the thought — was there a plan afoot to overcome the dangerous Miss Guile by means more sinister than subtle?

Enlightenment came unexpectedly and with a shock to his composure. He had observed the three spirited saddlehorses near the entrance of the hotel, in charge of two stable-boys, but had regarded them only as splendid specimens of equine aristocracy. It had not entered his mind to look upon them as agents of despair.

Two people emerged from the door and, passing by without so much as a glance in his direction, made their way to the mounting block. Robin's heart went down to his boots. Bedelia, a graceful figure in a smart riding habit, was laughing blithely over a soft-spoken remark that her companion had made as they were crossing the porch. And that companion was no other than the tall, good-looking fellow who had

met her at Cherbourg! The Prince, stunned and incredulous, watched them mount their horses and canter away, followed by a groom who seemed to have sprung up from nowhere.

"Good morning, Mr. Schmidt," spoke a voice, and, still bewildered, he whirled, hat in hand, to confront Mrs. Gaston. "Did I startle you?"

He bowed stiffly over the hand she held out for him to clasp, and murmured something about being proof against any surprise. The colour was slowly returning to his face, and his smile was as engaging as ever despite the bitterness that filled his soul. Here was a pretty trick to play on a fellow! Here was a slap in the face!

"Isn't it a glorious morning? And how wonderful she is in this gorgeous sunlight," went on Mrs. Gaston, in what may be described as a hurried, nervous manner.

"I had the briefest glimpse of her," mumbled Robin. "When did she come?"

"Centuries and centuries ago, Mr. Schmidt," said she, with a smile. "I was speaking of the Jungfrau."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, flushing. "I thought you — er — yes, of course! Really quite wonderful. I have heard it said that she never removes her night-cap, but always greets the dawn in spotless — ahem! Of course you understand that I am speaking of the Jungfrau," he floundered.

"Naturally, Mr Schmidt. And so you came, after

all. We were afraid you might have concluded to alter your plans. Miss Guile will be delighted."

He appeared grateful for the promise. "I have been here for three days, Mrs. Gaston. You were delayed in leaving Paris?"

"Yes," she said, and changed the subject. "The riding is quite good, I understand. They are off for Lauterbrunnen."

"I see," said he. "There is a splendid inn there, I am told."

"They will return here for luncheon, of course," she said, raising her eyebrows slightly. His heart became a trifle lighter at this. "Mr. White is a lifelong friend and acquaintance of the family," she volunteered, apropos of nothing.

"Oh, his name is White?" with a quiet laugh.

"If you have nothing better to do, Mr. Schmidt, why not come with me to the Kursaal? The morning concert will begin shortly, and I —"

"I think you will find that the band plays in the square across the way, Mrs. Gaston, and not in the Casino. At least, that has been the programme for the last two mornings."

"Nevertheless, there is a concert at the Casino today," she informed him. "Will you come?"

"Gladly," he replied, and they set off for the Kursaal. He found seats in the half-empty pavillion and prepared to listen to the music, although his real interest was following the narrow highway to Lauterbrunnen — and the Staubbach.

"This is to be a special concert given at the request of the Grand Duke who, I hear, is leaving this afternoon for Berne."

"The Grand Duke? I was not aware of the presence of royalty," said he in surprise.

"No? He has been here for three days, but at another hotel. The Grand Duke Paulus and his family, you know."

Robin shot a swift, apprehensive glance about the big enclosure, sweeping the raised circle from end to end. On the opposite side of the pavillion he discovered the space reserved for the distinguished party. Although he was far removed from that section he sank deeper into his chair and found one pretext after another to screen his face from view. He did know the Grand Duke Paulus and the Grand Duke knew him, which was even more to the point.

The Prince of Graustark had been a prime favourite of the great man since his knickerbocker days. Twice as a boy he had visited in the ducal palace, far distant from Graustark, and at the time of his own coronation the Grand Duke and his sons had come to the castle in Edelweiss for a full month's stay. They knew him well and they would recognise him at a glance. At this particular time the last thing on earth that he desired was to be hailed as a royal prince.

Never, in all his life, had he known the sun to penetrate so brightly into shadows as it did to-day. He felt that he was sitting in a perfect glare of light

and that every feature of his face was clear to the most distant observer.

He was on the point of making an excuse to leave the place when the ducal party came sauntering down the aisle on their way to the reserved section. Every one stood up, the band played, the Grand Duke bowed to the right and to the left, and escape was cut off. Robin could only stand with averted face and direct mild execrations at the sunlight that had seemed so glorious at breakfast-time.

"He is a splendid-looking man, isn't he?" Mrs. Gaston was saying. She was gazing in rapt admiration upon the royal group.

"He is, indeed," said Robin, resolutely scanning a programme, which he continued to hold before his face. When he sat down again, it was with his back to the band. "I don't like to watch the conductors," he explained. "They do such foolish things, you know."

Mrs. Gaston was eyeing him curiously. He was bitterly conscious of a crimson cheek. In silence they listened to the first number. While the applause was at its height, Mrs. Gaston leaned forward and said to him:

"I am afraid you are not enjoying the music, Mr. Schmidt. What is on your mind?"

He started. "I — I — really, Mrs. Gaston, I am enjoying it. I —"

"Your mind has gone horse-back riding, I fear. At present it is between here and Lauterbrunnen, jogging beside that roaring little torrent that —"

"I don't mind confessing that you are quite right," said he frankly. "And I may add that the music makes me so blue that I'd like to jump into that roaring torrent and — and swim out again, I suppose," he concluded, with a sheepish grin.

"You are in love."

"I am," he confessed.

She laid her hand upon his. Her eyes were wide with eagerness. "Would it drive away the blues if I were to tell you that you have a chance to win her?"

He felt his head spinning. "If — if I could believe that — that —" he began, and choked up with the rush of emotion that swept through him.

"She is a strange girl. She will marry for love alone. Her father is determined that she shall marry a royal prince. That much I may confess to you. She has defied her father, Mr. Schmidt. She will marry for love, and I believe it is in your power to awaken love in that adorable heart of hers. You —"

"For God's sake, Mrs. Gaston, tell me — tell me, has she breathed a word to you that —"

"Not a single word. But I know her well. I have known her since she was a baby, and I can read the soul that looks out through those lovely eyes. Knowing her so well, I may say to you — oh, it must be in the strictest confidence! — that you have a chance. And if you win her love, you will *have* the greatest treasure in all the world. She — but, look! The Grand Duke is leaving. He —"

"I don't care what becomes of the Grand Duke,"

he burst out. "Tell me more. Tell me how you look into her soul, and tell me what you see —"

"Not now, sir. I have said enough. I have given you the sign of hope. It remains with you to make the most of it."

"But you — you don't know anything about me. I may be the veriest adventurer, the most unworthy of all —"

"I think, Mr. Schmidt, that I know you pretty well. I do not require the aid of Diogenes' lantern to see an honest man. I am responsible for her welfare. She has been placed under my protection. For twenty years I have adored her. I am not likely to encourage an adventurer."

"I must be honest with you, Mrs. Gaston," he said suddenly. "I am not —"

She held up her hand. "Mr. Totten has informed me that you are a life-long friend of Mrs. Truxton King. I cabled to her from Paris. There is no more to be said."

His face fell. "Did she tell you — everything?"

"She said no more than that R. Schmidt is the finest boy in all the world." Suddenly her face paled. "You are never — *never* to breathe a word of this to — to Bedelia," she whispered.

"But her father? What will he say to —"

"Her father has said all that can be said," she broke in quietly. "He cannot force her to marry the man he has selected. She will marry the man she

loves. Come now! Let us go. I am tired of the music."

"Thank you, thank you, Mrs. Gaston," he cried, with shining eyes. "God bless you!"

She gave him a queer look. "You must not think that your task is an easy one," she said meaningly. "There are other men in the world, you know."

CHAPTER XIX

"WHAT WILL MY PEOPLE DO!"

THE Grand Duke and his party left Interlaken by special train early in the afternoon, and great was Robin's relief when Hobbs returned with the word that they were safely on their way to the capital of Switzerland. He emerged from the seclusion of his room, where he had been in hiding since noon, and set out for a walk through the town. His head was high and his stride jaunty, for his heart was like a cork. People stared after him with smiles of admiration, and never a *cocher'* passed him by without a genial, inviting tilt of the eyebrow and a tentative pull at the reins, only to meet with a pleasant shake of the head or the negative flourish of a bamboo cane.

Night came and with it the silvery glow of moonlight across the hoary headed queen of the Oberland. When Robin came out from dinner he seated himself on the porch, expectant, eager — and vastly lonesome. An unaccountable shyness afflicted him, rendering him quite incapable of sending his card up to the one who could have dispelled the gathering gloom with a single glance of the eye. Would she come stealing out ostensibly to look at the night-capped peak, but with furtive glances into the shadows of the porch in quest of — But no! She would not do that! She would

come attended by the exasperating Mr. White and the friendly duenna. Her starry eyes, directed elsewhere, would only serve to increase the depth of the shadows in which he lurked impatient.

She came at last — and alone. Stopping at the rail not more than an arm's length from where he sat, she gazed pensively up at the solemn mistress of the valley, one slim hand at her bosom, the other hanging limp at her side. He could have touched that slender hand by merely stretching forth his own. Breathless, enthralled, he sat as one deprived of the power or even the wish to move. The spell was upon him; he was in thralldom.

She wore a rose-coloured gown, soft, slinky, seductive. A light Egyptian scarf lay across her bare shoulders. The slim, white neck and the soft dark hair — but she sighed! He heard that faint, quick-drawn sigh and started to his feet.

"Bedelia!" he whispered softly.

She turned quickly, to find him standing beside her, his face aglow with rapture. A quick catch of the breath, a sudden movement of the hand that lay upon her breast, and then she smiled,— a wavering, uncertain smile that went straight to his heart and shamed him for startling her. "I beg your pardon," he began lamely. "I — I startled you."

She held out her hand to him, still smiling. "I fear I shall never become accustomed to being pursued," she said, striving for command of her voice. "It is dreadful to feel that some one is forever watch-

ing you from behind. I am glad it is you, however. You at least are not 'the secret eye that never sleeps'!" She gently withdrew her hand from his ardent clasp. "Mrs. Gaston told me that she had seen you. I feared that you might have gone on your way rejoicing."

"Rejoicing?" he cried. "Why do you say that?"

"After our experience in Paris, I should think that you had had enough of me and my faithful watch-dogs."

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed. "I shall never have enough of you," he went on, with sudden boldness. "As for the watch-dogs, they are not likely to bite us, so what is there to be afraid of?"

"Have you succeeded in evading the watchful eye of Mr. Totten's friend?" she enquired, sending an apprehensive glance along the porch.

"Completely," he declared. "I am quite alone in this hotel and, I believe, unsuspected. And you? Are you still being —"

"Sh! Who knows? I think we have thrown them off the track, but one cannot be sure. I raised a dreadful rumpus about it in Paris, and — well, they said they were sorry and advised me not to be worried, for the surveillance would cease at once. Still, I am quite sure that they lied to me."

"Then you *are* being followed."

She smiled again, and there was mischief in her eyes. "If so, I have led them a merry chase. We have been travelling for two days and nights, Mr.

Schmidt, by train and motor, getting off at stations unexpectedly, hopping into trains going in any direction but the right one, sleeping in strange beds and doing all manner of queer things. And here we are at last. I am sure you must look upon me as a very silly, flibberty-gibbet creature."

"I see that your retinue has been substantially augmented," he remarked, a trace of jealousy in his voice. "The good-looking Mr. White has not been eluded."

"Mr. White? Oh, yes, I see. But he is to be trusted, Mr. Schmidt," she said mysteriously — and tantalisingly. "He will not betray me to my cruel monster of a father. I have his solemn promise not to reveal my whereabouts to any one. My father is the last person in the world to whom he would go with reports of my misdoings."

"I saw you this morning, riding with him," said he glumly.

"Through the telescope?" she inquired softly, laying a hand upon the stationary instrument.

He flushed hotly. "It was when you were starting out, Miss Guile. I am not one of the spies, you should remember."

"You are my partner in guilt," she said lightly. "By the way, have you forgiven me for leading you into temptation?"

"Certainly. I am still in the Garden of Eden, you see, and as I don't take any stock in the book of Genesis, I hope to prove to myself at least, that the cor-

duct of an illustrious forebear of mine was not due to the frailties of Eve but to his own tremendous anxiety to get out of a place that was filled with snakes. I hope and pray that you will continue to put temptation in my path so that I may have the frequent pleasure of falling."

She turned her face away and for a moment was silent. "Shall we take those chairs over there, Mr. Schmidt? They appear to be as abandoned as we." She indicated two chairs near the broad portals.

He shook his head. "If we are looking for the most utterly abandoned, allow me to call your attention to the two in yonder corner."

"It is quite dark over there," she said with a frown.

"Quite," he agreed. "Which accounts, no doubt, for your failure to see them."

"Mrs. Gaston will be looking for me before —" she began hesitatingly.

"Or Mr. White, perhaps. Let me remind you that they have exceedingly sharp eyes."

"Mr. White is no longer here," she announced.

His heart leaped. "Then I, at least, have nothing to fear," he said quickly.

She ignored the banality. "He left this afternoon. Very well, let us take the seats over there. I rather like the — shall I say shadows?"

"I too object to the limelight,— Bedelia," he said, offering her his arm.

"You are not to call me Bedelia," she said, holding back.

"Then 'forgive us our transgressions' is to be applied in the usual order, I presume."

"Are you sorry you called me Bedelia?" she insisted, frowning ominously.

"No. I'm sorry you object, that's all."

They made their way through a maze of chairs and seated themselves in the dim corner. Their view of the Jungfrau from this vine-screened corner was not as perfect as it might have been, but the Jungfrau had no present power of allurement for them.

"I cannot stay very long," she said as she sank back in the comfortable chair.

He turned his back not only upon the occupants of the porch but the lustrous Jungfrau, drawing his chair up quite close to hers. As he leaned forward, with his elbows on the arms of the chair, she seemed to slink farther back in the depths of hers, as if suddenly afraid of him.

"Now, tell me everything," he said. "From beginning to end. What became of you after that day at St. Cloud, whither have you journeyed, and wherefore were you so bent on coming to this now blessed Interlaken?"

"Easily answered. Nothing at all became of me. I journeyed thither, and I came because I had set my heart on seeing the Jungfrau."

"But you had seen it many times."

"And I hoped that I might find peace and quiet here," she added quite distinctly.

"You expected to find me here, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I did not regard you as a disturber of the peace."

"You knew I would come, but you didn't know why, did you, Bedelia?" He leaned a little closer.

"Yes, I knew why," she said calmly, emotionlessly. He drew back instantly, chilled by her directness. "You came because there was promise of an interesting adventure, which you now are on the point of making impossible by a rather rash exhibition of haste."

He stared at her shadowy face in utter confusion. For a moment he was speechless. Then a rush of protesting sincerity surged up within him and he cried out in low, intense tones: "I cannot allow you to think that of me, Miss Guile. If I have done or said anything to lead you to believe that I am —"

"Oh, I beg of you, Mr. Schmidt, do not enlarge upon the matter by trying to apologise," she cried.

"I am not trying to apologise," he protested. "I am trying to justify what you are pleased to call an exhibition of haste. You see, it's just this way: I am obliged to make hay while the sun shines, for soon I may be cast into utter darkness. My days are numbered. In a fortnight I shall be where I cannot call my soul my own. I —"

"You alarm me. Are you to be sent to prison?"

"You wouldn't look upon it as a prison, but it seems like one to me. Do not laugh. I cannot explain to you now. Another day I shall tell you everything, so pray take me for what I am to-day, and ask

no questions. I have asked no more of you, so do you be equally generous with me."

"True," she said, "you have asked no questions of me. You take me for what I am to-day, and yet you know nothing of my yesterdays or my to-morrows. It is only fair that I should be equally confiding. Let there be no more questions. Are we, however, to take each other seriously?"

"By all means," he cried. "There will come a day when you may appreciate the full extent of my seriousness."

"You speak in riddles."

"Is the time ripe for me to speak in sober earnest?" he questioned softly. She drew back again in swift alarm.

"No, no! Not now — not yet. Do not say anything now, Mr. Schmidt, that may put an end to our — to our adventure."

She was so serious, so plaintive, and yet so shyly prophetic of comfort yet to be attained, that his heart warmed with a mighty glow of exaltation. A sweet feeling of tenderness swept over him.

"If God is good, there can be but one end to our adventure," he said, and then, for some mysterious reason, silence fell between them. Long afterward — it seemed hours to him! — she spoke, and her voice was low and troubled.

"Can you guess why I am being watched so carefully, why I am being followed so doggedly by men who serve not me but another?"

"Yes. It is because you are the greatest jewel in the possession of a great man, and he would preserve you against all varlets,— such as I."

She did not reveal surprise at his shrewd conjecture. She nodded her head and sighed.

"You are right. I am his greatest jewel, and yet he would give me into the keeping of an utter stranger. I am being protected against that conscienceless varlet — Love! If love lays hands upon me — ah, my friend, you cannot possibly guess what a calamity that would be!"

"And love *will* lay hands upon you, Bedelia,—"

"I am sure of that," she said, once more serene mistress of herself after a peculiarly dangerous lapse. "That is why I shudder. What could be more dreadful than to fall into the clutches of that merciless foe to peace? He rends one's heart into shreds; he stabs in the dark; he thrusts, cuts and slashes and the wounds never heal; he blinds without pity; he is overbearing, domineering, ruthless and his victims are powerless to retaliate. Love is the greatest tyrant in all the world, Mr. Schmidt, and we poor wretches can never hope to conquer him. We are his prey, and he is rapacious. Do you not shudder also?"

"Bless you, no! I'd rather enjoy meeting him in mortal combat. My notion of bliss would be a fight to the death with love, for then the conflict would not be one-sided. What could be more glorious than to stand face to face with love, hand to hand, breast to breast, lip to lip until the end of time? Let him cut

and slash and stab if you will, there would still be recompense for the vanquished. Even those who have suffered most in the conflict with love must admit that they have had a share in the spoils. One can't ignore the sweet hours when counting up the bitter ones, after love has withdrawn from the tender encounter. The cuts and slashes are cherished and memory is a store-house for the spoils that must be shared with vanity."

"It sounds like a book. Who is your favourite author?" she inquired lightly.

"Baedeker," he replied, with promptness. "Without my Baedeker, I should never have chanced upon the route travelled by love, nor the hotel where I now lodge in close proximity to —"

"Will you please be sensible?"

"You invite something to the contrary, Bedelia," he ventured.

"Haven't I requested you to —"

"I think of you only as Bedelia," he made haste to explain. "Bedelia will stick to you forever, you see, while Miss Guile is almost ephemeral. It cannot live long, you know, with so many other names eager to take its place. But Bedelia — ah, Bedelia is everlasting."

She laughed joyously, naturally. "You really are quite wonderful, Mr. Schmidt. Still I must change the subject. I trust the change will not affect your glibness, for it is quite exhilarating. How long do you purpose remaining in Interlaken?"

"That isn't changing the subject," said he. "I shall be here for a week or ten days — or perhaps longer." He put it in the form of a question, after all.

"Indeed? How I envy you. I am sorry to say I shall have to leave in a day or two."

His face fell. "Why?" he demanded, almost indignantly.

"Because I am enjoying myself," she replied.

"I don't quite get your meaning."

"I am having such a good time disobeying my father, Mr. Schmidt, and eluding pursuers. It is only a matter of a day or two before I am discovered here, so I mean to keep on dodging. It is splendid fun."

"Do you think it is quite fair to me?"

"Did I induce you to come here, good sir?"

"You did," said he, with conviction. "Heaven is my witness. I would not have come but for you. I am due at home by this time."

"Are you under any obligations to remain in Interlaken for a week or ten days?"

"Not now," he replied. "Do you mind telling me where you are going to, Miss Guile?"

"First to Vienna, then — well, you cannot guess where. I have decided to go to Edelweiss."

"Edelweiss!" he exclaimed in astonishment. He could hardly believe his ears.

"It is the very last place in the world that my father would think of looking for me. Besides I am curious

to see the place. I understand that the great Mr. Blithers is to be there soon, and the stupid Prince who will not be tempted by millions, and it is even possible that the extraordinary Miss Blithers may take it into her head to look the place over before definitely refusing to be its Princess. I may find some amusement — or entertainment as an on-looker when the riots begin."

He was staring at her wide-eyed and incredulous. "Do you really mean to say you are going to Graustark?"

"I have thought of doing so. Don't you think it will be amusing to be on the scene when the grand climax occurs? Of course, the Prince will come off his high horse, and the girl will see the folly of her ways, and old Mr. Blithers will run rough shod over everybody, and — but, goodness, I can't even speculate on the possibilities."

He was silent. So this was the way the wind blew, eh? There was but one construction to be put upon her decision to visit the Capital of Graustark. She *had* taken it into her head "to look the place over before definitely refusing to be its Princess!" His first thrill of exultation gave way to a sickening sense of disappointment.

All this time she was regarding him through amused, half-closed eyes. She had a distinct advantage over him. She knew that he was the Prince of Graustark; she had known it for many days. Perhaps if she had known all the things that were in his cunning brain,

she would not have ventured so far into the comedy she was constructing. She would have hesitated — aye, she might have changed her methods completely. But she was in the mood to do and say daring things. She considered her position absolutely secure, and so she could afford to enjoy herself for the time being. There would be an hour of reckoning, no doubt, but she was not troubled by its promise of castigation.

"Poor Prince!" she sighed pityingly. He started. The remark was so unexpected that he almost betrayed himself. It seemed profoundly personal. "He will be in very hot water, I fear."

He regarded her coldly. "And you want to be on hand to see him squirm, I suppose."

She took instant alarm. Was she going too far? His query was somewhat disconcerting.

"To be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Schmidt, I am going to Graustark because no one will ever think of looking for me in such an out-of-the-way place. I am serious now, so you must not laugh at me. Circumstances are such that I prefer to seek happiness after a fashion of my own. My parents love me, but they will not understand me. They wish me to marry a man they have picked out for me. I intend to pick out my own man, Mr. Schmidt. You may suspect, from all that you have seen, that I am running away from home, from those who are dearest in all the world to me. You knew that I was carefully watched in Paris. You know that my father fears

that I may marry a man distasteful to him, and I suppose to my mother, although she is not so —"

"Are his fears well-founded?" he asked, rudely interrupting her. "Is there a man that he has cause to fear? Are — are you in love with some one, Bedelia?"

"Do not interrupt me. I want you to know that I am not running away from home, that I shall return to it when I see fit, and that I am not in love with the man they suspect. I want you to be just with me. You are not to blame my father for anything, no matter how absurd his actions may appear to you in the light of the past few days. It is right that he should try to safeguard me. I am wayward but I am not foolish. I shall commit no silly blunder, you may be sure of that. Now do you understand me better?"

She was very serious, very intense. He laid his hand on hers, and she did not withdraw it. Emboldened, his hand closed upon the dainty fingers and an instant later they were borne to his hot lips.

"You have said that I came here in search of a light adventure," he whispered, holding her hand close to his cheek as he bent nearer to her. "You imply that I am a trifler, a light-o'-love. I want you to understand me better. I came here because I —"

"Stop!" she pleaded. "You must not say it. I am serious — yes, I know that you are serious too. But you must wait. If you were to say it to me now

I should have to send you away and — oh, believe me, I do not want to do that. I — I —"

"You love no one else?" he cried, rapturously.

She swayed slightly, as if incapable of resisting the appeal that called her to his heart. Her lips were parted, her eyes glowed luminously even in the shadows, and she scarcely breathed the words:

"I love no one else."

A less noble nature than his would have seized upon the advantage offered by her sudden weakness. Instead, he drew a long, deep breath, straightened his figure and as he gently released the imprisoned hand, the prince in him spoke.

"You have asked me to wait. I am sure that you know what is in my heart. It will always be there. It will not cut and slash and stab, for it is the most tender thing that has ever come into my life — or yours. It must never be accused of giving pain to you, so I shall obey you — and wait. You are right to avoid the risk of entrusting a single word of hope to me. I am a passer-by. My sincerity, my honesty of purpose remain to be proved. Time will serve my cause. I can only ask you to believe in me — to trust me a little more each day — and to let your heart be my judge."

She spoke softly. "I believe in you, I trust you even now, or I would not be here. You are kind to me. Few would have been so generous. We both are passers-by. It is too soon for us to judge each other in the full. I must be sure — oh, I must be sure of

myself. Can you understand? I must be sure of myself, and I am not sure now. You do not know how much there is at stake, you can not possibly know what it would mean to me if I were to discover that our adventure had no real significance in the end. I know it sounds strange and mysterious, or you would not look so puzzled. But unless I can be sure of one thing — one vital thing — our adventure has failed in every respect. Now, I must go in. No; do not ask me to stay — and let me go alone. I prefer it so. Good night, my comrade."

He stood up and let her pass. "Good night, my princess," he said, clearly and distinctly. She shot a swift glance into his eyes, smiled faintly, and moved away. His rapt gaze followed her. She entered the door without so much as a glance over her shoulder.

"My princess," he repeated wonderingly, to himself. "Have I kissed the hand of my princess? God in heaven, is there on earth a princess more perfect than she? Can there be in all this world another so deserving of worship as she?"

Late at night she sat in her window looking up at the peaceful Jungfrau. A dreamy, ineffably sweet smile lay in her dark eyes. The hand he kissed had lain long against her lips. To herself she had repeated, over and over again, the inward whisper:

"What will my dear, simple old dad say if I marry this man after all?"

In a window not ten feet away, he was staring out

into the night, with lowering eyes and troubled heart, and in his mind he was saying:

"What will my people do if I marry this woman after all?"

CHAPTER XX

LOVE IN ABEYANCE

Two days went by. They were fraught with an ever-increasing joy for the two who were learning to understand each other through the mute, though irresistible teachings of a common tutor. Each succeeding hour had its exquisite compensation; each presented the cup of knowledge to lips that were parched with the fever of impotence, and each time it was returned empty by the seekers after wisdom. There were days in which Love went harvesting and prospered amazingly in the fields, for each moment that he stored away against the future was ripe with promise. He was laying by the store on which he was to subsist to the end of his days; he allowed no moment to go to waste, for he is a miser and full of greed.

Not one word of love passed between these two who waited for the fruit to ripen. They were never alone together. Always they were attended by the calm, keen-eyed Mrs. Gaston, who, though she may have been in sympathy with their secret enterprise, was nevertheless a dependable barrier to its hasty consummation.

She had received her instructions from the one now most likely to be in need of a deterring influence; the girl herself. After that evening on the porch, Bedelia

had gone straight to her duenna with the truth. Then she made it clear to the good lady that she was not to be left alone for an instant to confront the welcome besieger. And so it was that when Robin and Bedelia walked or rode together, they were attended by prevention. In the Casino, at the gaming tables, at the concert, or even in the street he was never free to express a thought or emotion that, under less guarded conditions, might have exposed her to the risk she was so carefully avoiding.

He understood the situation perfectly and was not resentful. He appreciated the caution with which she was carrying on her own campaign, and he was not unmindful of the benefits that might also accrue to him through this proscribed period of reflection. While he was sure of himself by this time, and fully determined to risk even his crown for the girl who so calmly held him at bay, he was also sensible of the wisdom of her course. She was not willing to subject herself or him to the dangers of temptation. As she had said, there was a great deal at stake; the rest of their lives, in truth.

There was one little excursion to Grindelwald and its glacier, and later an ascent of the Schynige Platte. Even a desperate horror of the rack and pinion railway up and down the steep mountain did not daunt the incomparable chaperone. (True, she closed her eyes and shrank as far away from the edge of eternity as possible, but she stuck manfully to her post.) He

dined with them on the two evenings, and with them heard the concerts.

There were times when he was perplexed, and uncertain of her. At no time did she relax into what might have been considered a receptive or even an encouraging mood. He watched eagerly for the love-light that he hoped to surprise in her eyes, but it never appeared. She was serene, self-contained, natural. That momentary dissolving on her part when she sat with him in the shadows was the only circumstance he had to base his hopes upon. She had betrayed herself then by word and manner, but now she had her emotions well in hand.

Her lovely eyes met his frankly and without the faintest sign of diffidence or self-consciousness. Her soft laugh was free and unconstrained, her smile gay and remotely suggestive of mischief. At times he thought she was playing the game too well for one who professed to be concerned about the future.

On the third day he was convicted of duplicity. She went off for a walk alone, leaving him safely anchored in what he afterwards came to look upon as a pre-arranged game of auction-bridge. When she came in after an absence of at least two hours, the game was just breaking up. He noted the questioning look that Mrs. Gaston bestowed upon her fair charge, and also remarked that it contained no sign of reproof. The girl went up to her room without so much as a word with him. Her face was flushed

and she carried her head disdainfully. He was greatly puzzled.

The puzzle was soon explained. He waited for her on the stairway as she came down alone to dinner.

"You told me that your friends were not in Interlaken, Mr. Schmidt," she said coldly. "Why did you feel called upon to deceive me?"

He bit his lip. For an instant he reflected, and then gave an evasive answer. "I think I told you that I was alone in this hotel, Miss Guile. My friends are at another hotel. I am not aware that —"

"I have seen and talked with that charming old man, Mr. Totten," she interrupted. "He has been here for days, and Mr. Dank as well. Do you think that you have been quite fair with me?"

He lowered his eyes. "I think I have been most fair to both of us," he replied. "Will you believe me when I say that in a way I personally requested them to leave this hotel and seek another? And will it decrease your respect for me if I add that I wanted to have you all to myself, so to speak, and not to feel that these good friends of mine were —"

"Why don't you look me in the face, Mr. Schmidt?" she broke in. He looked up at once prepared to meet a look of disdain. To his surprise, she was smiling. "I have talked it all over with Mrs. Gaston, and she advised me to forgive you if you were in the least penitent and — honest. Well, you have made an honest confession, I am satisfied. Now, I have a confession to make. I have suspected all along that Mr. Totten

and Mr. Dank and the shadowy Mr. Gourou were in the town."

"You suspected?" he cried in amazement and chagrin.

"I was morally certain that they were here. To-day my suspicions were justified. I encountered Mr. Totten in the park beyond the Jungfraublick. He was very much upset, I can assure you, but he recovered with amazing swiftness. We sat on one of the benches in a nice little nook and had a long, long talk. He is a charming man. I have asked him to come to luncheon with us to-morrow, and to bring Mr. Dank."

"Good Lord, will wonders never —"

"But I did not include the still invisible Mr. Gourou. I was afraid that you would be too uncomfortable under the hawk-like eye of the gentleman who so kindly warned us at the Pavillon Bleu." There was gentle raillery in her manner. "I shall expect you to join us, Mr. Schmidt. You have no other engagement?"

"I — I shall be delighted," he stammered.

She laid her hand gently upon his arm and a serious sweetness came into her eyes.

"Come," she said; "let us go in ahead of Mrs. Gaston. Let us have just one little minute to ourselves, Mr. Schmidt."

It was true that she came upon the Count in one of the paths of the Kleine Rugen. He was walking slowly toward her, his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the ground. When she accosted him, he was plainly

confused, as she had said. After the first few passages in polite though stilted conversation, his keen, grey eyes resumed their thoughtful — it was even a calculating look.

"Will you sit here with me for a while, Miss Guile?" he asked gently. "I have something of the gravest importance to say to you."

She sat beside him on the sequestered bench, and when she arose to leave him an hour later, her cheek was warm with colour and her eyes were filled with tenderness toward this grim, staunch old man who was the friend of *her* friend. She laid her hand in his and suffered him to raise it to his lips.

"I hope, my dear young lady," said he with simple directness, "that you will not regard me as a stupid, interfering old meddler. God is my witness, I have your best interests at heart. You are too good and beautiful to —"

"I shall always look upon you as the kindest of men!" she cried impulsively, and left him.

He stood watching her slender, graceful figure as she moved down the sloping path and turned into the broad avenue. A smallish man with a lean face came up from the opposite direction and stopped beside him.

"Could you resist her, Quinnox, if you were twenty-two?" asked this man in his quiet voice.

Quinnox did not look around, but shook his head slowly. "I cannot resist her at sixty-two, my friend. She is adorable."

"I do not blame him. It is fate. *She* is fate.

Our work is done, my friend. We have served our country well, but fate has taken the matter out of our hands. There is nothing left for us to do but to fold our arms and wait." Gourou revealed his inscrutable smile as he pulled at his thin, scraggly moustache. He was shaking his head, as one who resigns himself to the inevitable.

After a long silence Quinnox spoke.

"Our people will come to love their princess, Gourou."

"Even as you and I, my friend," said the Baron.

And then they held their heads erect and walked confidently down the road their future sovereign had traversed before them.

When Mrs. Gaston joined Robin and Bedelia at the table which had been set for them in the *salle a manger*, she laid several letters before the girl who picked them up instantly and glanced at the superscription on each.

"I think that all of them are important," said Mrs. Gaston significantly. The smile on the girl's face had given way to a clouded brow. She was visibly perturbed.

"You will forgive me, Mr. Schmidt," she said nervously. "I must look at them at once."

He tried not to watch her face as she read what appeared to be a brief and yet evidently important letter, but his rapt gaze was not to be so easily managed. An exclamation of annoyance fell from her lips.

"This is from a friend in Paris, Mr. Schmidt," she

said, hesitatingly. Then, as if coming to a quick decision: "My father has heard that I am carrying on atrociously with a strange young man. It seems that it is a *new* young man. He is beside himself with rage. My friends have already come in for severe criticism. He blames them for permitting his daughter to run at large and to pick up with every Tom, Dick and Harry. Dear me, I shudder when I think of what he will do to you, Mrs. Gaston. He will take off your head completely. But never fear, you old dear, I will see that it is put on again as neatly as ever. So, you see, Mr. Schmidt, you now belong to that frightful order of nobodies, the Toms and the Dicks and the Harrys."

"I see that there is a newspaper clipping attached," he remarked. "Perhaps your father has been saying something to the newspapers." It was a mean speech and he regretted it instantly.

She was not offended, however. Indeed, she may not have heard what he said, for she was reading the little slip of printed matter. Suddenly she tore it into tiny bits and scattered them under the table. Her cheeks were red and her eyes glistened unmistakably with mortification. He was never to know what was in that newspaper cutting, but he was conscious of a sharp sensation of anger and pity combined. Whatever it was, it was offensive to her, and his blood boiled. He noted the expression of alarm and apprehension deepen in Mrs. Gaston's face.

Bedelia slashed open another envelope and glanced

at its contents. Her eyes flew open with surprise. For an instant she stared, a frown of perplexity on her brow.

"We are discovered!" she cried a moment later, clapping her hands together in an ecstasy of delight. "The pursuers are upon our heels. Even now they may be watching me from behind some convenient post or through some handy window pane. Isn't it fine? Don't look so horrified, you old dear. They can't eat us, you know, even though we are in a dining-room. I love it all! Followed by man-hunters! What could be more thrilling? The chase is on again. Quick! We must prepare for flight!"

"Flight?" gasped Robin. Her eyes were dancing. His were filled with dismay.

"It is as I feared," she cried. "They have found me out. Hurry! Let us finish this wretched dinner. I must leave here to-night."

"Impossible!" cried Mrs. Gaston. "Don't be silly. To-morrow will be time enough. Calm yourself, my dear."

"To-morrow at sunrise," cried Bedelia enthusiastically. "It is already planned, Mr. Schmidt. I have engaged an automobile in anticipation of this very emergency. The trains are not safe. To-morrow I fly again. This letter is from the little stenographer in Paris. I bribed her — yes, I bribed her with many francs. She is in the offices of the great detective agency—'the Eye that never Sleeps!' I

shall give her a great many more of those excellent francs, my friends. She is an honest girl. She did not fail me."

"I don't see how you can say she is honest if she accepted a bribe," said Mrs. Gaston severely.

"Pooh!" was Miss Guile's sufficient answer to this. "We cross the Brunig Pass by motor. That really is like flying, isn't it?"

"To Lucerne?" demanded Robin, still hazily.

"No, no! That would be madness. We shall avoid Lucerne. Miles and miles to the north we will find a safe retreat for a day or two. Then there will be a journey by rail to — to your own city of Vienna, Mr. Schmidt. You —"

"See here," said Robin flatly, "I don't understand the necessity for all this rushing about by motor and —"

"Of course you don't," she cried. "You are not being sought by a cruel, inhuman monster of a father who would consign you to a most shudderable fate! You don't have to marry a man whose very name you have hated. You can pick and choose for yourself. And so shall I, for that matter. You —"

"You *adore* your father," cut in Mrs. Gaston sharply. "I don't think you should speak of him in that —"

"Of course I adore him! He is a dear old bear. But he is a monster, an ogre, a tyrant, a — oh, well, he is everything that's dreadful! You look dreadfully serious, Mr. Schmidt. Do you think that I should

submit to my father's demands and marry the man he has chosen for me?"

"I do," said Robin, abruptly and so emphatically that both of his hearers jumped in their seats. He made haste to dissemble. "Of course, I'd much rather have you do that than to break your neck rolling over a precipice or something of the sort in a crazy automobile dash."

Miss Guile recovered her poise with admirable promptness. Her smile was a trifle uncertain, but she had a dependable wit. "If that is all that you are afraid of, I'll promise to save my neck at all costs," she said. "I could have many husbands but only one poor little neck."

"You can have only one husband," said he, almost savagely. "By the way, why don't you read the other letter?" He was regarding it with jealous eyes, for she had slipped it, face downward, under the edge of her plate.

"It isn't important," she said, with a quick look into his eyes. She convicted herself in that glance, and knew it on the instant.

Angry with herself, she snatched up the letter and tore it open. Her cheeks were flushed. She read however without betraying any additional evidence of uneasiness or embarrassment. When she had finished, she deliberately folded the sheets and stuck them back into the envelope without comment. One looking over her shoulder as she read, however, might have caught snatches of sentences here and there on the heavily

scrawled page. They were such as these: "You had led me to hope," . . . "for years I have been your faithful admirer," . . . "Nor have I wavered for an instant despite your whimsical attitude," . . . "therefore I felt justified in believing that you were sincere in your determination to defy your father." And others of an even more caustic nature: "You are going to marry this prince after all," . . . "not that you have ever by word or deed bound yourself to me, yet I had every reason to hope," . . . "Your father will be pleased to find that you are obedient," . . . "I am not mean enough to wish you anything but happiness, although I know you will never achieve it through this sickening surrender to vanity," . . . "if I were a prince with a crown and a debt that I couldn't pay," . . . "admit that I have had no real chance to win out against such odds," etc.

She faced Robin coolly. "It will be necessary to abandon our little luncheon for to-morrow. I am sorry. Still Mr. Totten informs me that he will be in Vienna shortly. The pleasure is merely postponed."

"Are you in earnest about this trip by motor to-morrow morning?" demanded Robin darkly. "You surely cannot be —"

"I am very much in earnest," she said decisively. He looked to Mrs. Gaston for help. That lady placidly shook her head. In fact, she appeared to be rather in favour of the preposterous plan, if one were to judge by the rapt expression on her countenance.

"I had the supposedly honest word of these crafty gentlemen that I was not to be interfered with again. They gave me their promise. I shall now give them all the trouble possible."

"But it will be a simple matter for them to find out how and when you left this hotel and to trace you perfectly."

"Don't be too sure of that," she said, exultantly. "I have a trick or two up my sleeve that will baffle them properly, Mr. Schmidt."

"My dear," interposed Mrs. Gaston severely, "do not forget yourself. It isn't necessary to resort to slang in order —"

"Slang is always necessary," avowed Bedelia, undisturbed. "Goodness, I know I shall not sleep a wink to-night."

"Nor I," said Robin gloomily. Suddenly his face lightened. A wild, reckless gleam shot into his eyes and, to their amazement, he banged the table with his fist. "By Jove, I know what I shall do. I'll go with you!"

"No!" cried Bedelia, aghast. "I — I cannot permit it, Mr. Schmidt. Can't you understand? You — *you* are the man with whom I am supposed to be carrying on atrociously. What could be more convicting than to be discovered racing over a mountain pass — Oh, it is not to be considered — not for an instant."

"Well, I can tell you flatly just what I intend to do," said he, setting his jaws. "I shall hire another

car and keep you in sight every foot of the way. You may be able to elude the greatest detective agency in Europe, but you can't get away from me. I intend to keep you now that I've got you, Bedelia. You can't shake me off. Where you go, I go."

"Do you mean it?" she cried, a new thrill in her voice. He looked deep into her eyes and read there a message that invited him to perform vast though fool-hardy deeds. Her eyes were suddenly sweet with the love she had never expected to know; her lips trembled with the longing for kisses. "I shall travel far," she murmured. "You may find the task an arduous one — keeping up with me, I mean."

"I am young and strong," he said, "and, if God is good to me, I shall live for fifty years to come, or even longer. I tingle with joy, Bedelia, when I think of being near you for fifty years or more. Have — have you thought of it in that light? Have you looked ahead and said to yourself: fifty years have I to live and all of them with —"

"Hush! I was speaking of a week's journey, not of a life's voyage, Mr. Schmidt," she said, her face suffused.

"I was speaking of a honeymoon," said he, and then remembered Mrs. Gaston. She was leaning back in her chair, smiling benignly. He had an uncomfortable thought: was he walking into a trap set for him by this clever woman? Had she an ulterior motive in advancing his cause?

"But it would be perfectly silly of you to follow me in a car," said Bedelia, trying to regain her lost composure. "Perfectly silly, wouldn't it, Mrs. Gaston?"

"Perfectly," said Mrs. Gaston.

"I will promise to see you in Vienna —"

"I intend to see you every day," he declared, "from now till the end of time."

"Really, Mr. Schmidt, you —"

"If there is one thing I despise beyond all reason, Bedelia, it is the name of 'Schmidt'! I wish you wouldn't call me by that name."

"I can't just call you 'Mister,'" she demurred.

"Call me Rex for the present," said he. "I will supply you with a better one later on."

"May I call him Rex?" she inquired of her companion.

"In moderation," said Mrs. Gaston.

"Very well, then, Rex, I have changed my mind. I shall not cross the Brunig by motor since you insist upon risking your neck in pursuit of me. I shall go by train in the morning,— calmly, complacently, stupidly by train. Instead of a thrilling dash for liberty over rocky heights and through perilous gorges, I shall travel like any bourgeoise in a second — or third class carriage, and the only thrill I shall have will be when we stop for Baker's chocolate at the top of the Pass. By that time I expect to be sufficiently hungry to be thrilled even by the sight of a

cake of chocolate. Will you travel in the carriage behind me? I fancy it will be safe and convenient and you can't possibly be far from my heels."

"That's a sensible idea," he cried. "And we may be able to accommodate your other pursuers on the same train. What's the sense of leaving them behind? They'd only catch us up in the end, so we might just as well take them along with us."

"No. We will keep well ahead of them. I insist on that. They can't get here before to-morrow afternoon, so we will be far in the lead. We will be in Vienna in two days. There I shall say good-bye to you, for I am going on beyond. I am going to Graustark, the new Blithers estate. Surely you will not follow me there."

"You are very much mistaken. I shall be there as soon as you and I shall stay just as long, provided Mr. Blithers has no objections," said Robin, with more calmness than he had hoped to display in the face of her sudden thrust.

"We are forgetting our dinner," said Mrs. Gaston quietly. "I think the waiter is annoyed."

CHAPTER XXI

MR. BLITHERS ARRIVES IN GRAUSTARK

MR. WILLIAM W. BLITHERS arrived in Edelweiss, the Capital of Graustark, on the same day that the Prince returned from his tour of the world. As a matter of fact, he travelled by special train and beat the Prince home by the matter of three hours. The procession of troops, headed by the Royal Castle Guard, it was announced would pass the historic Hotel Regengetz at five in the afternoon, so Mr. Blithers had front seats on the extension porch facing the Platz.

He did not know it, but if he had waited for the regular train in Vienna, he would have had the honour of travelling in the same railway carriage with the royal young man. ("Would" is used advisedly in the place of "might," for he *would* have travelled in it, you may be sure.)

Moreover, he erred in another particular, for arriving at the same instant and virtually arm-in-arm with the country's sovereign, he could hardly have been kept out of the procession itself. When you stop to think that next to the Prince he was the most important personage in the realm on this day of celebration, it ought not to be considered at all unreasonable for him to have expected some notable attention, such as being placed in the first carriage

immediately behind the country's sovereign, or possibly on the seat facing him. Missing an opportunity like this, wasn't at all Mr. Blithers' idea of success. He was very sorry about the special train. If it hadn't been for that train he might now be preparing to ride castlewards behind a royal band instead of sitting with his wife in the front row of seats on a hotel porch, just like a regular guest, waiting for the parade to come along. It certainly was a wasted opportunity.

He had lost no time in his dash across the continent. In the first place, his agents in Paris made it quite clear to him that there was likely to be "ructions" in Graustark over the loan and the prospect of a plebeian princess being seated on the throne whether the people liked it or not; and in the second place, Maud Applegate had left a note on his desk in the Paris offices, coolly informing him that she was likely to turn up in Edelweiss almost as soon as he. She added an annoying postscript. She said she was curious to see what sort of a place it was that he had been wasting his money on!

To say that he was put out by Maud's aggravating behaviour would be stating the case with excessive gentleness. He was furious. He sent for the head of the detective agency and gave him a blowing up that he was never to forget. It appears that the detectives had followed a false lead and had been fooled by the wary Maud in a most humiliating manner. They hadn't the remotest notion where she was.

and evinced great surprise when informed in a voice loud enough to be heard a half-block away that she was on her way to Graustark. They said it couldn't be possible, and he said they didn't know what they were talking about. He was done with them. They could step out and ask the cashier to give them a check for their services, and so on and so forth. He did not forget to notify them that they were a gang of loafers.

Then he dragged Mrs. Blithers off to the Gare de l'Este and took the Express to Vienna. He would see to the loan first and to Maud afterward.

He had no means of knowing that a certain Miss Guile was doing more to shape the destiny of the principality of Graustark than all the millions he had poured into its treasury. Nor had he the faintest suspicion that she was even then on Graustark soil and waiting as eagerly as he for the procession to pass a given point.

Going back a day or two, it becomes necessary to report that while in Vienna the perverse Bedelia played a shabby trick on the infatuated Robin. She stole away from the Bristol in the middle of the night and was half-way to the Graustark frontier before he was aware of her flight. She left a note for him, the contents of which sufficed to ease his mind in the presence of what otherwise might have been looked upon as a calamity. Instead of relapsing into despondency over her defection, he became astonishingly exuberant. It was relief and not despair that fol-

lowed the receipt of the brief letter. She had played directly into his hand, after all. In other words, she had removed a difficulty that had been troubling him for days: the impossibility of entering his own domain without betraying his identity to her. Naturally his entrance to the Capital would be attended by the most incriminating manifestation on the part of the populace. The character of R. Schmidt would be effaced in an instant, and, according to his own notion, quite a bit too soon to suit his plans. He preferred to remain Schmidt until she placed her hand in his and signified a readiness to become plain Mrs. R. Schmidt of Vienna. That would be his hour of triumph.

In her note she said: "Forgive me for running away like this. It is for the best. I must have a few days to myself, dear friend,— days for sober reflection uninfluenced by the presence of a natural enemy to composure. And so I am leaving you in this cowardly, graceless fashion. Do not think ill of me. I give you my solemn promise that in a few days I shall let you know where I may be found if you choose to come to me. Even then I may not be fully convinced in my own mind that our adventure has reached its climax. You have said that you would accompany me to Graustark. I am leaving to-night for that country, where I shall remain in seclusion for a few days before acquainting you with my future plans. It is not my intention to stop in Edelweiss at present. The newspapers proclaim a state of unrest there

over the coming visit of Mr. Blithers and the return of the Prince, both of whom are very much in the public eye just now. I prefer the quiet of the country to the excitement of the city, so I shall seek some remote village and give myself up to — shall I say prayerful meditation? Believe me, dear Rex, to be your most devoted, though whimsical, Bedelia."

He was content with this. Deep down in his heart he thanked her for running away at such an opportune time! The situation was immeasurably simplified. He had laid awake nights wondering how he could steal into his own domain with her as a companion and still put off the revelation that he was not yet ready to make. Now the way was comparatively easy. Once the demonstration was safely over, he could carry on his adventure with something of the same security that made the prowlings of the Bagdad Caliphs such happy enterprises, for he could with impunity traverse the night in the mantle of R. Schmidt.

Immediately upon receiving her letter, he sent for Quinnox and Gourou, who were stopping at a hotel nearby.

"I am ready to proceed to Edelweiss, my friends," said he. "Miss Guile has departed. Will you book accommodations on the earliest train leaving for home?"

"I have already seen to that, highness," said Gourou calmly. "We leave at six this evening. Count Quinnox has wired the Prime Minister that you will arrive

in Edelweiss at three to-morrow afternoon, God willing."

"You knew that she had gone?"

"I happened to be in the Nordbahnhof when she boarded the train at midnight," replied the Baron, unmoved.

"Do you never sleep?" demanded Robin hotly.

"Not while I am on duty," said Gourou.

The Prince was thoughtful, his brow clouding with a troubled frown. "I suppose I shall now have to face my people with the confession that will confirm their worst fears. I may as well say to you, my friends, that I mean to make her my wife even though it costs me my kingdom. Am I asking too much of you, gentlemen, when I solicit your support in my fight against the prejudice that is certain to —"

Quinnox stopped him with a profound gesture of resignation and a single word: "Kismet!" and Gourou, with his most ironic smile, added: "You may count on us to support the crown, highness, even though we lose our heads."

"Thank you," said Robin, flushing. "Just because I appear to have lost my head is no reason for your doing the same, Baron Gourou."

The Baron's smile was unfaltering. "True," he said. "But we may be able to avoid all that by inducing the people of Graustark to lose their hearts."

"Do you think they will accept her as — as their princess?" cried Robin, hopefully.

"I submit that it will first be necessary for you

to induce Miss Guile to accept you as her prince," said Gourou mildly. "That doesn't appear to be settled at present."

He took alarm. "What do you mean? Your remark has a sinister sound. Has anything transpired to —"

"She has disappeared, highness, quite effectually. That is all that I can say," said Gourou, and Robin was conscious of a sudden chill and the rush of cold moisture to his brow. "But let us prepare to confront an even more substantial condition. A prospective father-in-law is descending upon our land. He is groping in the dark and he is angry. He has lost a daughter somewhere in the wilds of Europe, and he realises that he cannot hope to become the grandfather of princes unless he can produce a mother for them. At present he seems to be desperate. He doesn't know where to find her, as Little Bo-peep might have said. We may expect to catch him in a very ugly and obstreperous mood. Have I told you that he was in this city last night? He arrived at the Bristol a few hours prior to the significant departure of Miss Guile. Moreover, he has chartered a special train and is leaving to-day for Edelweiss. Count Quinnox has taken the precaution to advise the Prime Minister of his approach and has impressed upon him the importance of decrying any sort of popular demonstration against him on his arrival. Romano reports that the people are in an angry mood. I would suggest that you prepare, in

a way, to placate them, now that Miss Guile has more or less dropped out of sight. It behooves you to —"

"See here," broke in Robin harshly, "have you had the effrontery to make a personal appeal to Miss Guile in your confounded efforts to prevent the —"

"Just a moment, Robin," exclaimed Count Quinnox, his face hardening. "I am sorry to hear words of anger on your lips, and directed toward your most loyal friends. You ask us to support you and in the next breath imply that we are unworthy. It is beneath the dignity of either Baron Gourou or myself to reply to your ungenerous charge."

"I beg your pardon," said Robin, but without lowering his head. He was not convinced. The barb of suspicion had entered his brain. Were they, after all, responsible for Bedelia's flight? Had they revealed his identity to the girl and afterward created such alarm in her breast that she preferred to slink away in the night rather than to court the humiliation that might follow if she presumed to wed Graustark's prince in opposition to his country's wish? "You must admit that the circumstance of her secret flight last night is calculated to — But, no matter. We will drop the subject. I warn you, however, that my mind is fixed. I shall not rest until I have found her."

"I fancy that the state of unrest will be general," said Gourou, with perfect good-nature. "It will go very hard with Graustark if we fail to find her. And

now, to return to our original sin: What are we to do about the ambitious Mr. Blithers? He is on my conscience and I tremble."

It must not be supposed for an instant that the City of Edelweiss and the court of Graustark was unimpressed by the swift approach and abrupt arrival of Mr. Blithers. His coming had been heralded for days in advance. The city was rudely expectant, the court uneasy. The man who had announced his determination to manage the public and private affairs of the principality was coming to town. He was coming in state, there could be no doubt about that. More than that, he was coming to propitiate the people whether they chose to be mollified or not. He was bringing with him a vast store of business acumen, an unexampled confidence and the self-assurance of one who has never encountered failure. Shylock's mantle rested on his hated shoulders, and Judas Iscariot was spoken of with less abhorrence than William W. Blithers by the Christian country of Graustark. He was coming to get better acquainted with his daughter's future subjects.

Earlier in the week certain polite and competent gentlemen from Berlin had appeared at the Castle gates, carrying authority from the dauntless millionaire. They calmly announced that they had come to see what repairs were needed in and about the Castle and to put the place in shape. A most regrettable incident followed. They were chased out of town by an angry mob and serious complications

with the German Empire were likely to be the result of the outrage.

Moreover, the citizens of Graustark were openly reluctant to deposit their state bonds as security for the unpopular loan, and there was a lively sentiment in favour of renouncing the agreement entered into by the cabinet.

The Prime Minister, in the absence of the Prince, called mass meetings in all the towns and villages and emissaries of the crown addressed the sullen crowds. They sought to clarify the atmosphere. So eloquent were their pleadings and so sincere their promises that no evil would befall the state, that the more enlightened of the people began to deposit their bonds in the crown treasury. Others, impressed by the confidence of their more prosperous neighbours, showed signs of weakening. The situation was made clear to them. There could be no possible chance of loss from a financial point of view. Their bonds were safe, for the loan itself was a perfectly legitimate transaction, a conclusion which could not be gainsaid by the most pessimistic of the objectors. Mr. Blithers would be paid in full when the time came for settlement, the bonds would be restored to their owners, and all would be well with Graustark.

As for the huge transactions Mr. Blithers had made in London, Paris and Berlin, there could be but one conclusion: he had the right to invest his money as he pleased. That was his look-out. The bonds of Graustark were open to purchase in any market.

Any investor in the world was entitled to buy all that he could obtain if he felt inclined to put his money to that use. The earnest agents of the government succeeded in convincing the people that Mr. Blithers had made a good investment because he was a good business man. What did it matter to Graustark who owned the outstanding bonds? It might as well be Blithers as Bernstein or any one else.

As for Miss Blithers becoming the Princess of Graustark, that was simple poppy-cock, declared the speakers. The crown could take oath that Prince Robin would not allow *that* to happen. Had he not declared in so many words that he would never wed the daughter of William Blithers, and, for that matter, hadn't the young woman also announced that she would have none of him? There was one thing that Mr. Blithers couldn't do, and that was to marry his daughter to the Prince of Graustark.

And so, by the time that Mr. Blithers arrived in Edelweiss, the people were in a less antagonistic frame of mind,— though sullenly suspicious,— and were even prepared to grin in their sleeves, for, after all, it was quite clear that the joke was not on them but on Mr. Blithers.

When the special train pulled into the station Mr. Blithers turned to his wife and said:

"Cheer up, Lou. This isn't a funeral."

"But there is quite a mob out there," she said, peering through the car window. "How can we be sure that they are friendly?"

"Don't you worry," said Mr. Blithers confidently. "They are not likely to throw rocks at the goose that lays the golden egg." If he had paused to think, he would not have uttered such a careless indictment. The time would come when she was to remind him of his thoughtless admission, omitting, however, any reference to the golden egg.

The crowd was big, immobile, surly. It lined the sidewalks in the vicinity of the station and stared with curious, half-closed eyes at the portly capitalist and his party, which, by the way, was rendered somewhat imposing in size by augmentation in the shape of lawyers from Paris and London, clerks and stenographers from the Paris office, and four plain clothes men who were to see to it that Midas wasn't blown to smithereens by envious anarchists; to say nothing of a lady's maid, a valet, a private secretary and a doctor. (Mr. Blithers always went prepared for the worst.)

He was somewhat amazed and disgruntled by the absence of silk-hat ambassadors from the Castle, with words of welcome for him on his arrival. There was a plentiful supply of policemen but no cabinet ministers. He was on the point of censuring his secretary for not making it clear to the government that he was due to arrive at such and such an hour and minute, when a dapper young man in uniform — he couldn't tell whether he was a patrolman or a captain — came up and saluted.

"I am William W. Blithers," said he sharply.

"I am an official guide and interpreter, sir," announced the young man suavely. "May I have the honour —"

"Not necessary — not necessary at all," exploded Mr. Blithers. "I can get about without a guide."

"You will require an interpreter, sir," began the other, only to be waved aside.

"Any one desiring to speak to me will have to do it in English," said Mr. Blithers, and marched out to the carriages.

He was in some doubt at first, but as his carriage passed swiftly between the staring ranks on the sidewalks, he began to doff his hat and bow to the right and the left. His smiles were returned by the multitude, and so his progress was more or less of a triumph after all.

At the Regengetz he found additional cause for irritation. The lords and nobles who should have met him at the railway station were as conspicuously absent in the rotunda of the hotel. No one was there to receive him except the ingratiating manager of the establishment, who hoped that he had had a pleasant trip and who assured him that it would not be more than a couple of hours before his rooms would be vacated by the people who now had them but were going away as soon as the procession had passed.

"Get 'em out at once," stormed Mr. Blithers. "Do you think I want to hang around this infernal lobby until —"

"Pardon me," said the manager blandly, "but your

rooms will not be ready for you before four or five o'clock. They are occupied. We can put you temporarily in rooms at the rear if your lady desires to rest and refresh herself after the journey."

"Well, I'll be —" began Mr. Blithers, purple in the face, and then leaned suddenly against the counter, incapable of finishing the sentence.

The manager rubbed his hands and smiled. "This is one of our gala days, Mr. Blithers. You could not have arrived at a time more opportune. I have taken the precaution to reserve chairs for you on the verandah. The procession will pass directly in front of the hotel on its way to Castle avenue."

"What procession?" demanded Mr. Blithers. He was beginning to recall the presence of uniformed bands and mounted troops in the side streets near the station.

"The Prince is returning to-day from his trip around the world," said the manager.

"He ought to have been back long ago," said Mr. Blithers wrathfully, and mopped his brow with a hand rendered unsteady by a mental convulsion. He was thinking of his hat-lifting experience.

True to schedule, the procession passed the hotel at five. Bands were playing, people were shouting, banners were waving, and legions of mounted and foot soldiers in brilliant array clogged the thoroughfare. The royal equipage rolled slowly by, followed by less gorgeous carriages in which were seated the men who

failed to make the advent of Mr. Blithers a conspicuous success.

Prince Robin sat in the royal coach, faced by two unbending officers of the Royal Guard. He was alone on the rear seat, and his brown, handsome face was aglow with smiles. Instead of a hat of silk, he lifted a gay and far from immaculate conception in straw; instead of a glittering uniform, he wore a suit of blue serge and a peculiarly American tie of crimson hue. He looked more like a popular athlete returning from conquests abroad than a prince of ancient lineage. But the crowd cheered itself hoarse over this bright-faced youngster who rode by in a coach of gold and brandished a singularly unregal chapeau.

His alert eyes were searching the crowd along the street, in the balconies and windows with an eager intensity. He was looking for the sweet familiar face of the loveliest girl on earth, and knew that he looked in vain, for even though she were one among the many her features would be obscured by an impenetrable veil. If she were there, he wondered what her thoughts might be on beholding the humble R. Schmidt in the rôle of a royal prince receiving the laudations of the loving multitude!

Passing the Regengetz, his eyes swept the rows of cheering people banked upon its wide terrace and verandahs. He saw Mr. and Mrs. Blithers well down in front, and for a second his heart seemed to stand still. Would she be with them? It was with a dis-

tinct sensation of relief that he realised that she was not with the smiling Americans.

Mr. Blithers waved his hat and, instead of shouting the incomprehensible greeting of the native spectators, called out in vociferous tones:

"Welcome home! Welcome! Hurrah!"

As the coach swerved into the circle and entered the great, tree-lined avenue, followed by the clattering chorus of four thousand horse-shoes, Mrs. Blithers after a final glimpse of the disappearing coach, sighed profoundly, shook out her handkerchief from the crumpled ball she had made of it with her nervously clenched fingers, touched her lips with it and said:

"Oh, what a remarkably handsome, manly boy he is, Will."

Mr. Blithers nodded his head proudly. "He certainly is. I'll bet my head that Maud is crazy about him already. She can't help it, Lou. That trip on the *Jupiter* was a God-send."

"I wish we could hear something from her," said Mrs. Blithers, anxiously.

"Don't you worry," said he. "She'll turn up safe and sound and enthusiastic before she's a week older. We'll have plain sailing from now on, Lou."

CHAPTER XXII

A VISIT TO THE CASTLE

Mr. Blithers indeed experienced plain sailing for the ensuing twenty hours. It was not until just before he set forth at two the next afternoon to attend, by special appointment, a meeting of the cabinet in the council chamber at the Castle that he encountered the first symptom of squalls ahead.

He had sent his secretary to the Castle with a brief note suggesting an early conference. It naturally would be of an informal character, as there was no present business before them. The contracts had already been signed by the government and by his authorised agents. So far as the loan was concerned there was nothing more to be said. Everything was settled. True, it was still necessary to conform to a certain custom by having the Prince affix his signature to the contract over the Great Seal of State, but as he previously had signed an agreement in New York this brief act was of a more or less perfunctory nature.

The deposit of bonds by the state and its people would follow in course of time, as prescribed by contract, and Mr. Blithers was required to place in the Bank of Graustark, on such and such a date, the sum of three million pounds sterling. Everybody was sat-

isfied with the terms of the contract. Mr. Blithers was to get what really amounted to nearly nine per-cent on a gilt-edged investment, and Graustark was to preserve its integrity and retain its possessions.

There was a distant cloud on the financial horizon, however, a vague shadow at present,— but prophetic of storm. It was perfectly clear to the nobles that when these bonds matured, Mr. Blithers would be in a position to exact payment, and as they matured in twelve years from date he was likely to be pretty much alive and kicking when the hour of reckoning arrived.

Mr. Blithers was in the mood to be amiable. He anticipated considerable pleasure in visiting the ancient halls of his prospective grandchildren. During the forenoon he had taken a motor ride about the city with Mrs. Blithers, accompanied by a guide who created history for them with commendable glibness and some veracity, and pointed out the homes of great personages as well as the churches, monuments and museums. He also told them in a confidential undertone that the Prince was expected to marry a beautiful American girl and that the people were enchanted with the prospect! That sly bit of information realised ten dollars for him at the end of the trip, aside from his customary fee.

The first shock to the placidity of Mr. Blithers came with the brief note in reply to his request for an informal conference. The Lord Chamberlain curtly informed him that the Cabinet would be in session at

two and would be pleased to grant him an audience of half an hour, depending on his promptness in appearing.

Mr. Blithers was not accustomed to being granted audiences. He had got into the habit of having them thrust upon him. It irritated him tremendously to have any one measure time for him. Why, even the President of the United States, the Senate, or the District Attorney in New York couldn't do *that* for him. And here was a whipper-snapper Lord Chamberlain telling him that the Cabinet would grant him half-an-hour! He managed to console himself, however, with the thought that matters would not always be as they were at present. There would be a decided change of tune later on.

It would be folly to undertake the depiction of Mr. Blithers' first impressions of the Castle and its glories, both inside out. To begin with, he lost no small amount of his assurance when he discovered that the great gates in the wall surrounding the park were guarded by resplendent dragoons who politely demanded his "pass." After the officer in charge had inspected the Lord Chamberlain's card as if he had never seen one before, he ceremoniously indicated to a warden that the gates were to be opened. There was a great clanking of chains, the drawing of iron bolts, the whirl of a windlass, and the ponderous gates swung slowly ajar.

Mr. Blithers caught his breath — and from that instant until he found himself crossing the great hall

in the wake of an attendant delegated to conduct him to the council chamber his sensations are not to be described. It is only necessary to say that he was in a reverential condition, and that is saying a great deal for Mr. Blithers. A certain bombastic confidence in himself gave way to mellow timidity. He was in a new world. He was cognisant of a distinct sensation of awe. His ruthless Wall Street tread became a mincing, uncertain shuffle; he could not conquer the absurd notion that he ought to tip-toe his way about these ancient halls with their thick, velvety rugs and whispering shadows.

Everywhere about him was pomp, visible and invisible. It was in the great stairway, the vaulted ceilings, the haughty pillars, over all of which was the sheen of an age that surpassed his comprehension. Rigid servitors watched his progress through the vast spaces — men with grim, unsmiling faces. He knew, without seeing, that this huge pile was alive with noble lords and ladies: The court! Gallantry and beauty to mock him with their serene indifference!

Somewhere in this great house beautiful women were idling, or feasting, or dreaming. He was conscious of their presence all about him, and shrank slightly as he wondered if they were scrutinising his ungainly person. He was suddenly ashamed of his tight-fitting cut-a-way coat and striped trousers. Really he ought to get a new suit! These garments were much too small for him.

Were ironic eyes taking in the fresh creases in those New York trousers? Were they regarding his shimmering patent leather shoes with an intelligence that told them that he was in pain? Were they wondering how much he weighed and why he didn't unbutton his coat when he must have known that it would look better if it didn't pinch him so tightly across the chest? Above all things, were they smiling at the corpulent part of him that preceded the rest of his body, clad in an immaculate waistcoat? He never had felt so conspicuous in his life, nor so certain that he was out of place.

Coming in due time — and with a grateful heart — to a small ante-chamber, he was told to sit down and wait. He sat down very promptly. In any other house he would have sauntered around, looking at the emblems, crests and shields that hung upon the walls. But now he sat and wondered. He wondered whether this could be William W. Blithers. Was this one of the richest men in the world — this fellow sitting here with his hands folded tightly across his waistcoat? He was forced to admit that it was and at the same time it wasn't.

The attendant returned and he was ushered into a second chamber, at the opposite end of which was a large, imposing door — closed. Beside this door stood a slim, erect figure in the red, blue and gold uniform of an officer of the Castle guard. As Mr. Blithers approached this rigid figure, he recognised

a friend and a warm glow pervaded his heart. There could be no mistaking the smart moustache and supercilious eye-brows. It was Lieutenant Dank.

"How do you do?" said Mr. Blithers. "Glad to see you again." His voice sounded unnatural. He extended his hand.

Dank gave him a ceremonious salute, bowed slightly but without a smile, and then threw open the door.

"Mr. Blithers, my lords," he announced, and stood aside to let the stranger in a strange land pass within.

A number of men were seated about a long table in the centre of this imposing chamber. No one arose as Mr. Blithers entered the room and stopped just inside the door. He heard it close gently behind him. He was at a loss for the first time in his life. He didn't know whether he was to stop just inside the door fingering his hat like a messenger boy, or go forward and join the group. His gaze fell upon a huge oaken chair at the far end of the table. It was the only unoccupied seat that came within the scope of his rather limited vision. He could not see anything beyond the table and the impassive group that surrounded it. Was it possible that the big chair was intended for him? If so, how small and insignificant he would look upon it. He had a ghastly notion that his feet would not touch the floor, and he went so far as to venture the hope that there would be a substantial round somewhere about midway from the bottom.

He had appeared before the inquisitorial commit-

tees in the United States Senate, and had not been oppressed by the ponderous gravity of the investigation. He had faced the Senators without a tremor of awe. He had even regarded them with a confidence, equal if not superior to their own. But now he faced a calm, impassive group of men who seemed to strip him down to the flesh with a cool, piercing interest, and who were in no sense impressed by what they saw.

Despite his nervousness he responded to the life long habit of calculation. He counted the units in the group in a single, rapid glance, and found that there were eleven. Eleven lords of the realm! Eleven stern, dignified, unsmiling strangers to the arrogance of William W. Blithers! Something told him at once that he could not spend an informal half-hour with them. Grim, striking, serious visages, all of them! The last hope for his well-fed American humour flickered and died. He knew that it would never do to regale them in an informal off-hand way — as he had planned — with examples of native wit.

Reverting to the precise moment of his entrance to the Castle, we find Mr. Blithers saying to himself that there wasn't the slightest use in even hoping that he might be invited to transfer his lodgings from the Regengetz to the Royal bed-chambers. The chance of being invited to dine there seemed to dwindle as well. While he sat and waited in the first antechamber he even experienced strange misgivings in respect to parental privileges later on.

After what appeared to him to be an interminable

length of time, but in reality no more than a few seconds, a tall man arose from his seat and advanced with outstretched hand. Mr. Blithers recognised Count Quinnox, the Minister of War. He shook that friendly hand with a fervour that must have surprised the Count. Never in all his life had he been so glad to see any one.

"How are you, my lord," said the king of finance, fairly meek with gratefulness.

"Excellently well, Mr. Blithers," returned the Count. "And you?"

"Never better, never better," said Mr. Blithers, again pumping the Count's hand up and down — with even greater heartiness than before. "Glad to see you. Isn't it a pleasant day? I was telling Mrs. Blithers this morning that I'd never seen a pleasanter day. We —"

"Let me introduce you to my colleagues, Mr. Blithers," interrupted the Count.

"Happy, I'm sure," mumbled Mr. Blithers. To save his life, he couldn't tell what had got into him. He had never acted like this before.

The Count was mentioning the names of dukes, counts and barons, and Mr. Blithers was bowing profoundly to each in turn. No one offered to shake hands with him, although each rose politely, even graciously. They even smiled. He remembered that very well afterwards. They smiled kindly, almost benignly. He suddenly realised what had got into him. It was respect.

"A chair, Franz," said the white haired, gaunt man who was called Baron Romano. "Will you sit here, Mr. Blithers? Pray forgive our delay in admitting you. We were engaged in a rather serious discussion over—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Mr. Blithers, magnanimously. "Am I interfering with any important business, gent—my lords? If so, just—"

"Not at all, Mr. Blithers. Pray be seated."

"Sure I'm not taking any one's seat?"

"A secretary's, sir. He can readily find another."

Mr. Blithers sat down. He was rather pleased to find that the big chair was not meant for him. A swift intuition told him that it was reserved for the country's ruler.

"The Prince signed the contracts just before you arrived, Mr. Blithers," said Baron Romano. "The seal has been affixed to each of the documents, and your copy is ready for delivery at any time."

Mr. Blithers recovered himself slightly. "You may send it to the hotel, Baron, at any time to-morrow. My lawyers will have a look at it." Then he made haste to explain: "Not that it is really necessary, but just as a matter of form. Besides, it gives the lawyers something to do." He sent an investigating glance around the room.

"The Prince has retired," said the Baron, divining the thought. "He does not remain for the discussions." Glancing at the huge old clock above the door, the Prime Minister assumed a most business-like

air. "It will doubtless gratify you to know that three-fourths of the bonds have been deposited, Mr. Blithers, and the remainder will be gathered in during the week. Holders living in remote corners of our country have not as yet been able to reach us with their securities. A week will give them sufficient time, will it not, Count Lazzar?"

"I may safely say that all the bonds will be in our hands by next Tuesday at the latest," said the Minister of the Treasury. He was a thin, ascetic man; his keen eyes were fixed rather steadily upon Mr. Blithers. After a moment's pause, he went on: "We are naturally interested in your extensive purchases of our outstanding bonds, Mr. Blithers. I refer to the big blocks you have acquired in London, Paris and Berlin."

"Want to know what I bought them for?" inquired Mr. Blithers amiably.

"We have wondered not a little at your readiness to invest such a fortune in our securities."

"Well, there you have it. Investment, that's all. Your credit is sound, and your resources unquestioned, your bonds gilt-edge. I am glad of the opportunity to take a few dollars out of Wall Street uncertainties and put 'em into something absolutely certain. Groo — Gras — er — Groostock bonds are pretty safe things to have lying in a safety vault in these times of financial unrest. They create a pretty solid fortune for my family,— that is to say, for my daughter and her children. A sensible business man,

— and I claim to be one,— looks ahead, my lords. Railroads are all right as long as you are alive and can run them yourself. It's after you are dead that they fail to do what is expected of them. New fingers get into the pie, and you never can tell what they'll pull out in their greediness. I cannot imagine anything safer in the shape of an investment than the bonds of a nation that has a debt of less than fifty million dollars. As a citizen of a republic whose national debt is nearly a billion, I confess that I can't see how you've managed so well."

"We are so infinitesimal, Mr. Blithers, that I daresay we could be lost in the smallest of your states," said Baron Romano, with a smile.

"Rhode Island is pretty small," Mr. Blithers informed him, without a smile.

"It is most gratifying to Graustark to know that you value our securities so highly as a legacy," said Count Lazzar, suavely. "May I venture the hope, however, that your life may be prolonged beyond the term of their existence? They expire in a very few years — a dozen, in fact."

"Oh, I think I can hang on that long," said Mr. Blithers, a little more at ease. He was saying to himself that these fellows were not so bad, after all. "Still one never knows. I may be dead in a year. My daughter — but, of course, you will pardon me if I don't go into my private affairs. I fear I have already said too much."

"On the contrary, sir, we are all only too willing

to be edified. The workings of an intelligence such as yours cannot fail to be of interest to us who are so lacking in the power to cope with great undertakings. I confess to a selfish motive in asking you about your methods of — er — investment," said the Minister of Finance. Mr. Blithers failed to see that he was shrewdly being led up to a matter that was of more importance to Graustark just then than anything along financial lines.

"I am only too willing, my lords, to give you the benefit of my experience. Any questions that you may care to ask, I'll be glad to answer to the best of my ability. It is only natural that I should take a great personal interest in Graustock from now on. I want to see the country on the boom. I want to see it taking advantage of all the opportunities that — er — come its way. There may be a few pointers that William W. Blithers can give you in respect to your railways and mines — and your general policy, perhaps. I hope you won't hesitate about asking."

The Prime Minister tapped reflectively upon the table-top with his fingers for a moment or two.

"Thank you," he said. "We are at this very moment in something of a quandary in respect to the renewal of a treaty with one of our neighbours. For the past twenty years we have been in alliance with our next door neighbours, Axphain on the north and Dawsbergen on the south and east. The triple alliance will end this year unless renewed. Up to the present our relations have been most amiable. Ax-

phain stands ready to extend our mutual protective agreement for another term of years, but Dawsbergen is lukewarm and inclined to withdraw. When you become better acquainted with the politics of our country you will understand how regrettable such an action on the part of a hitherto friendly government will be."

"What's the grievance?" inquired Mr. Blithers, bluntly. He was edging into familiar waters now. "What's the matter with Dawsbergen? Money controversy?"

"Not at all," said Lazzar hastily.

"Why not let 'em withdraw?" said Mr. Blithers. "We can get along without them."

There was a general uplifting of heads at the use of the pronoun, and a more fixed concentration of gaze.

"I daresay you are already acquainted with the desire on the part of Dawsbergen to form an alliance in which Axphain can have no part," said Baron Romano. "In other words, it has been the desire of both Dawsbergen and Graustark to perfect a matrimonial alliance that may cement the fortunes of the two countries —"

"Count Quinnox mentioned something of the sort," interrupted Mr. Blithers. "But suppose this matrimonial alliance doesn't come off, who would be the sufferer, you or Dawsbergen? Who will it benefit the most?"

There was a moment's silence. Doubtless it had

never occurred to the Ministry to speculate on the point.

"Dawsbergen is a rich, powerful country," said Romano. "We will be the gainers by such an alliance, Mr. Blithers."

"I don't go much on alliances," said the capitalist. "I believe in keeping out of them if possible."

"I see," said the Baron reflectively. There was another silence. Then: "It has come to our notice in a most direct manner that the Prince of Dawsbergen feels that his friendly consideration of a proposal made by our government some years ago is being disregarded in a manner that can hardly be anything but humiliating to him, not only as a sovereign but as a father."

"He's the one who has the marriageable daughter, eh? I had really forgotten the name."

The Baron leaned forward, still tapping the table-top with his long, slim fingers.

"The report that Prince Robin is to marry your daughter, Mr. Blithers, has reached his ears. It is only natural that he should feel resentful. For fifteen years there has been an understanding that the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen and the Prince of Graustark were one day to be wedded to each other. You will admit that the present reports are somewhat distressing to him and unquestionably so to the Crown Princess."

Mr. Blithers settled back in his chair. "It seems

to me that he is making a mountain out of a mole-hill."

Baron Romano shrank perceptibly. "It devolves upon me, sir, as spokesman for the Ministry, the court and the people of Graustark, to inform you that marriage between our Prince and any other than the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen is not to be considered as possible."

Mr. Blithers stared. "Hasn't the Prince any voice in the matter?" he demanded.

"Yes. He has already denied, somewhat publicly, that he is not contemplating marriage with your daughter. He has had a voice in that matter at least."

A fine moisture started out on the purplish brow of Mr. Blithers. Twenty-two eyes were upon him. He realised that he was not attending an informal conference. He had been brought here for a deliberate purpose.

"I may be permitted the privilege of reminding you, my lords, that his denial was no more emphatic than that expressed by my daughter," he said, with real dignity.

"We have accepted her statement as final, but it is our earnest desire that the minds of the people be set at rest," said the Baron gravely. "I sincerely trust that you will appreciate our position, Mr. Blithers. It is not our desire or intention to offend in this matter, but we believe it to be only fair and

just that we should understand each other at the outset. The impression is afoot that —"

"My lords," said Mr. Blithers, rising, his face suddenly pale, "I beg leave to assure you that my daughter's happiness is of far more importance to me than all the damned principalities in the world. Just a moment, please. I apologise for the oath — but I mean it, just the same. I do not resent your attitude, nor do I resent your haste in conveying to me your views on the subject. It may be diplomacy to go straight to a question and get it over with, but it isn't always diplomatic to go off half-cocked. I will say, with perfect candour, that I should like to see my daughter the Princess of Graustark, but — by God! I want you to understand that her own wishes in the matter are to govern mine in the end. I have had this marriage in mind, there's no use denying it. I have schemed to bring these two young people together with a single object in view. I knew that if they saw enough of each other they would fall in love, and they would want the happiness that love brings to all people. Just a moment, Baron! I want to say to you now, all of you, that if my girl should love your prince and he should love her in return, there isn't a power below heaven that can keep them apart. If she doesn't love him, and he should be unlucky enough to love her, I'd see him hanged before he could have her. I'll admit that I have counted on seeing all of this come to pass, and that I have bungled the thing pretty badly because I'm a loving, selfish father,—

but, my lords, since you have brought me here to tell me that it is impossible for my girl to marry your prince, I will say to you, here and now, that if they ever love each other and want to get married, I'll see to it that it isn't impossible. You issue an ultimatum to me, in plain words, so I'll submit one to you, in equally plain words. I intend to leave this matter entirely to my daughter and Prince Robin. They are to do the deciding, so far as I am concerned. And if they decide that they love each other and want to get married, *they will get married.* Do I make myself perfectly plain, my lords?"

The dignified Ministry of Graustark sat agape. With his concluding words, Mr. Blithers deposited his clenched fist upon the table with a heavy thud, and, as if fascinated, every eye shifted from his face to the white knuckles of that resolute hand.

Baron Romano also arose. "You place us in the extremely distressing position of being obliged to oppose the hand of a benefactor, Mr. Blithers. You have come to our assistance in a time of need. You have —"

"If it is the loan you are talking about, Baron, that is quite beside the question," interrupted Mr. Blithers. "I do not speculate. I may have had a personal motive in lending you this money, but I don't believe you will find that it enters into the contract we have signed. I don't lend money for charity's sake. I sometimes give it to charity, but when it comes to business, I am not charitable. I have made

a satisfactory loan and I am not complaining. You may leave out the word benefactor, Baron. It doesn't belong in the game."

"As you please, sir," said Romano coldly. "We were only intent upon conveying to you our desire to maintain friendly relations with you, Mr. Blithers, despite the unpleasant conditions that have arisen. I may at least question your right to assume that we are powerless to prevent a marriage that is manifestly unpopular with the subjects of Prince Robin."

"I had it on excellent authority to-day that the people are not opposed to the union of my daughter and the prince," said Mr. Blithers.

"I am compelled to say that you have been misinformed," said the Baron, flatly.

"I think I have not been misinformed, however, concerning the personal views of Prince Robin. If I am not mistaken, he openly declares that he will marry to suit himself and not the people of Graustark. Isn't it barely possible, my lords, that he may have something to say about who he is to marry?"

"I confess that his attitude is all that you describe," said the Baron. "He has announced his views quite plainly. We admit that he may have something to say about it."

"Then I submit that it isn't altogether an improbability that he may decide to marry according to the dictates of his heart and not for the sake of appearances," said Mr. Blithers scathingly. "I have an

idea that he will marry the girl he loves, no matter who she may be."

Count Quinnox and Baron Gourou exchanged glances. These two men were guilty of having kept from their colleagues all information concerning a certain Miss Guile. They, as well as Dank, were bound by a promise exacted by their sovereign prince. They alone knew that Mr. Blithers was supported by an incontrovertible truth. For the present, their lips were sealed, and yet they faced that anxious group with a complete understanding of the situation. They knew that Mr. Blithers was right. Prince Robin would marry the girl that he loved, and no other. They knew that their prince expected to marry the daughter of the man who now faced these proud noblemen and virtually defied them!

"Am I not right, Count Quinnox?" demanded Mr. Blithers, turning suddenly upon the Minister of War. "You are in a position to know something about him. Am I not right?"

Every eye was on the Count. "Prince Robin will marry for love, my lords," he said quietly. "I am forced to agree with Mr. Blithers."

Baron Romano sank into his chair. There was silence in the room for many seconds.

"May I enquire, Count Quinnox, if you know anything of the present state of Prince Robin's — er — heart?" inquired the Prime Minister finally.

A tinge of red appeared in each of Count Quinnox's swarthy cheeks.

"I can only surmise," said he briefly.

"Has — has he met some one in whom he feels a — er — an interest?"

"Yes."

"May we have the benefit of your conclusions?" said Baron Romano, icily.

"I am not at liberty to supply information at present," said the Count, visibly distressed.

Mr. Blithers leaned forward, his hands upon the table. "Some one he met after leaving New York?" he inquired eagerly.

"Time will reveal everything, Mr. Blithers," said the Count, and closed his jaws resolutely. His colleagues looked at him in consternation. The worst, then, had happened!

A gleam of triumph shot into the eyes of Mr. Blithers. His heart swelled. He felt himself stepping out upon safe, solid ground after a period of floundering. The very best, then, had happened!

"My lords, I find that my half-hour is almost up," he said, pulling out his gold watch and comparing its time with that of the clock on the wall. "Permit me to take my departure. I am content to let matters shape themselves as they may. Shakespeare says 'there is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them'— er — and so forth. Allow me, however, before leaving, to assure you of my most kindly interest in the welfare of your State. You may be pleased to know that it is not from me that Graustark — did I get it right that time? — will redeem her bonds when

they mature, but from my only daughter. She is nearly twenty-one years of age. On her twenty-fifth birthday I shall present to her — as a gift — all of my holdings in Graustark. She may do as she sees fit with them. Permit me to wish you all good day, my lords. You may send the contract to my hotel, Baron. I expect to remain in the city for some time."

As he traversed the vast halls on his way to the outer world, he was again overcome by the uneasy conviction that ironic eyes were looking out upon him from luxurious retreats. Again he felt that his coat fitted him too tightly and that his waistcoat was painfully in evidence. He hurried a bit. If he could have had his way about it, he would have run. Once outside the castle doors, he lighted a big cigar, and threw the burnt-out match upon the polished flagstones of the terrace. He regretted the act on the instant. He wished he had not thrown it there. If the solemn grooms had not been watching, he would have picked it up and stuck it into his pocket for disposal on the less hallowed stones of a city thoroughfare.

Outside the gates he felt more at ease, more at home, in fact. He smoked in great contentment. In the broad, shady avenue he took out his watch and pried open the case. A great pride filled his eyes as he looked upon the dainty miniature portrait of his daughter Maud. She *was* lovely — she was even lovelier than he had ever thought before.

At the Regengetz a telegram awaited him. It was from Maud.

"I shall be in Edelweiss this week without fail. I have something very important to tell you." So it read.

CHAPTER XXIII

PINGARI'S

Nine o'clock of a rainy night, on the steep, winding road that climbed the mountain-side from the walled-in city to the crest on which stood the famed monastery of St. Valentine,— nine o'clock of a night fraught with pleasurable anticipation on the part of one R. Schmidt, whose eager progress up the slope was all too slow notwithstanding the encouragement offered by the conscienceless Jehu who frequently beat his poor steeds into a gallop over level stretches and never allowed them to pause on the cruel grades.

Late in the afternoon there had come to the general post-office a letter for Mr. R. Schmidt. He had told her that any message intended for him would reach his hands if directed to the post-office. Since his arrival in the city, three days before, he had purposely avoided the main streets and avenues of Edelweiss, venturing forth but seldom from the Castle grounds, and all because he knew that he could not go abroad during the day-time without forfeiting the privileges to be enjoyed in emulation of the good Caliphs of Baghdad. His people would betray their prince because they loved him: his passage through the streets could only be attended by respectful homage on the part of every man, woman and child in the place. If Bedelia were there, she could not help knowing who

and what he was, with every one stupidly lifting his hat and bowing to him as he passed, and he did not want Bedelia to know the truth about him until she had answered an all-important question, as has been mentioned before on more than one occasion in the course of this simple tale.

Her letter was brief. She merely acquainted him with the fact that she had arrived in Edelweiss that day from Ganlook, twenty miles away, and was stopping at the Inn of the Stars outside the city gates and half way up the mountain-side, preferring the quiet, ancient tavern to the stately Regengetz for reasons of her own.

In closing she said that she would be delighted to see him when it was convenient for him to come to her. On receipt of this singularly matter-of-fact letter, he promptly despatched a message to Miss Guile, Inn of the Stars, saying that she might expect him at nine that night.

Fortunately for him, the night was wet and blustering. He donned a rain-coat, whose cape and collar served to cover the lower part of his face fairly well, and completed his disguise by pulling far down over his eyes the villainous broad-brimmed hat affected by the shepherds in the hills. He had a pair of dark eye-glasses in reserve for the crucial test that would come with his entrance to the Inn.

Stealing away from the Castle at night, he entered the ram-shackle cab that Hobbs had engaged for the

expedition, and which awaited him not far from the private entrance to the Park. Warders at the gate looked askance as he passed them by, but not one presumed to question him. They winked slyly at each other, however, after he had disappeared in the shadows beyond the rays of the feeble lanterns that they carried. It was good to be young!

The driver of that rattling old vehicle was no other than the versatile Hobbs, who, it appears, had rented the outfit for a fixed sum, guaranteeing the owner against loss by theft, fire or dissolution. It is not even remotely probable that the owner would have covered the ground so quickly as Hobbs, and it is certain that the horses never suspected that they had it in them.

The mud-covered vehicle was nearing the Inn of the Stars when Robin stuck his head out of the window and directed Hobbs to drive slower.

"Very good, sir," said Hobbs. "I thought as how we might be late after losing time at the city gates, sir, wot with that silly guard and the —"

"We are in good time, Hobbs. Take it easy."

The lights of the Inn were gleaming through the drizzle not more than a block away. Robin's heart was thumping furiously. Little chills ran over him, delicious chills of excitement. His blood was hot and cold, his nerves were tingling. The adventure!

"Whoa!" said Hobbs suddenly. "'Ello, wot the 'ell is —"

A dark figure had sprung into the road-way near the horses' heads, and was holding up a warning hand.

"Is this Mr. Schmidt's carriage?" demanded a hoarse, suppressed voice.

"It is," said Hobbs, "for the time being. Wot of it?"

Robin's head came through the window.

"What do you want?"

"Some one is coming out here to meet you, sir. Do not drive up to the doors. Those are the orders. You are to wait here, if you please."

Then the man shot away into the darkness, leaving the wayfarers mystified by his words and action.

"Wot am I to do, sir?" inquired Hobbs. "Most hextraordinary orders, and who the deuce is behind them, that's wot I'd like to know."

"We'll wait here, Hobbs," said Robin, and then put his hand suddenly to his heart. It was acting very queerly. For a moment he thought it was in danger of pounding its way out of his body!

Below him lay the lighted city, a great yellow cloud almost at his feet. Nearer, on the mountain-side were the misty lights in the windows of dwellers on the slope, and at points far apart the street lamps, dim splashes of light in the gloom. Far above were the almost obscured lights of St. Valentine, hanging in the sky. He thought of the monks up there. What a life! He would not be a monk, not he.

"My word!" exclaimed Hobbs, but instantly resumed his character as cabby.

A woman came swiftly out of the blackness and stopped beside the cab. She was swathed in a long gossamer, and hooded. The carriage lamps gleamed strong against the dripping coat.

"Is it you?" cried Robin, throwing open the door and leaping to the ground.

"It is I, M'sieur," said the voice of Marie, Miss Guile's French maid.

Bleak disappointment filled his soul. He had hoped for — but no! He might have known. She would not meet him in this manner.

"What has happened?" he cried, grasping the girl's arm. "Has she —"

"Sh! May we not speak in French?" said Marie, lowering her voice after a significant look at the motionless cabman. "He may understand English, M'sieur. My mistress has sent me to say to M'sieur that she has changed her mind."

"Changed her mind," gasped Robin.

"Yes, M'sieur. She will not receive you at the Inn of the Stars. She bids you drive to the end of this street, where there is a garden with a Magyar band, and the most delicious of refreshments to be had under vine-covered —"

"A public garden?" exclaimed Robin in utter dismay.

"Pingari's, sir," said Hobbs, without thinking. "I know the place well. It is a very quiet, orderly place — I beg pardon!"

"So he understands French, eh?" cried Marie sharply.

"It doesn't matter," cried Robin impatiently. "Why, in heaven's name, did she select a public eating-house in which to receive me?"

"If M'sieur chooses to disregard the wishes of —" began the maid, but he interrupted her.

"I am not accustomed to meeting people in public gardens. I —"

"Nor is my mistress, M'sieur. I assure you it is the first time she has committed an indiscretion of this kind. May I put a flea in M'sieur's ear? The place is quite empty to-night, and besides there is the drive back to the Inn with Mademoiselle. Is not that something, M'sieur?"

"By jove!" exclaimed Robin. "Drive on,— you! But wait! Let me take you to the Inn, Marie. It —"

"No! I may not accept M'sieur's thoughtful invitation. Bon soir, M'sieur."

She was off like a flash. Robin leaped nimbly into the cab.

"Pingari's, driver!" he said, his heart thumping once more.

"Very good, sir," and they were off at a lively rate, rattling quite gaily over the cobble-stones.

Pingari's is the jumping-off place. It stands at the sharp corner of an elbow in the mountain, with an almost sheer drop of a thousand feet into the quarries below. A low-roofed, rambling building, once

used as a troop-house for nomadic fighting-men who came from all parts of the principality on draft by feudal barons in the days before real law obtained, it was something of a historic place. Parts of the structure are said to be no less than five hundred years old, but time and avarice have relegated history to a rather uncertain background, and unless one is pretty well up in the traditions of the town, he may be taken in nicely by shameless attendants who make no distinction between the old and the new so long as it pays them to procrastinate.

As a matter of fact, the walls of the ancient troop-house surround what is now considered the kitchen, and one never steps inside of them unless he happens to be connected in a somewhat menial way with the green grocer, the fish-monger, the butcher or the poultry-man. The wonderful vine-covered porches, reeking with signs of decay and tottering with age, are in truth very substantial affairs constructed by an ancestor of the present Signor Pingari no longer ago than the Napoleonic era — which is quite recent as things go in Graustark.

Hobbs drove bravely into the court yard, shouted orders to a couple of hostlers and descended from the box. The Magyar band was playing blithely to the scattered occupants of the porches overlooking the precipice.

"'Ere we are, sir," said he to the Prince, as he jerked open the door of the cab. "Shall I wait, sir?"

"Certainly," said Robin, climbing out. "I am a long way from home, my good man."

He hurried up the steps and cast an eye about the place. There were no ladies unattached. As he was about to start on a tour of investigation, a polite person in brass buttons came up to him.

"Alone, sir?" he inquired pityingly.

"Quite," said Robin, still peering into the recesses.

"Then come with me, if you please. I am directed to escort you to one who is also alone. This way, sir."

Robin followed him through a door, down a narrow hallway, up a flight of stairs and out another door upon a small portico, sheltered by a heavy canvas awning. Two men were standing at the railing, looking down upon the impressionistic lights of the sunken city. The Prince drew back, his face hardening.

"What does this mean, sirrah? You said —"

At the sound of his voice the two men turned, stared at him intently for an instant and then deliberately strode past him, entered the door and disappeared. The person in brass buttons followed them.

A soft, gurgling laugh fell upon his ears — a laugh of pure delight. He whirled about and faced — one who was no longer alone.

She was seated at the solitary little table in the corner; until now it had escaped his notice for the excellent reason that it was outside the path of light

from the open doorway, and the faint glow from the adjacent porches did not penetrate the quiet retreat.

He sprang toward her with a glad cry, expecting her to rise. She remained seated, her hand extended. This indifference on her part may have been the result of cool premeditation. In any event, it served to check the impulsive ardour of the Prince, who, it is to be feared, had lost something in the way of self-restraint. It is certain — absolutely certain — that had she come forward to meet him, she would have found herself imprisoned in a pair of strong, eager arms,— and a crisis precipitated. He had to be content with a warm hand-clasp and a smile of welcome that even the gloom could not hide from his devouring eyes.

"My dear, dear Bedelia," he murmured. "I had almost given you up. Three long days have I waited for you. You —"

"I have never broken a promise, Rex," she said coolly. "It is you who are to be commended, not I, for you see I was coming to Graustark anyway. I should not have been surprised if you had failed me, sir. It is a long way from Vienna to this out-of-the-way —"

"The most distant spot in the world would not have been too far away to cause an instant's hesitation on my part," said he, dropping into the chair opposite her. "I would go to the end of the world, Bedelia."

"But your personal affairs — your business," she protested. "Can you neglect it so —"

"My business is to find happiness," said he. "I should be neglecting it indeed if I failed to pursue the only means of attaining it. You are happiness, Bedelia."

"What would you sacrifice for happiness?" she asked softly.

"All else in the world," he replied steadily. "If I were a king, my realm should go if it stood between me and — you, Bedelia."

She drew back with a queer little gasp, as if suddenly breathless.

"Wait — wait just for a moment," she said, with difficulty steadying her voice. "This night may see the end of our adventure, Rex. Let us think well before we say that it is over. I know, if you do not, that a great deal depends upon what we are to say to each other to-night. You will ask me to be your wife. Are you sure that you appreciate all that it means to you and to your future if I should say yes to that dear question?"

He looked at her intently. "What do you know, Bedelia?"

"I know that you are the Prince of Graustark and that it is ordained that you shall wed one whose station is the equal of your own. You must think well, dear Rex, before you ask Bedelia Guile to be your wife."

"You know that I am —" he began, dully, and then

burst into a mirthless laugh. "And knowing who I am, why do you not leap at the chance to become the Princess of Graustark? Why not realise an ambition that —"

"Hush! You see how well I considered when I advised you to think before speaking? You are now saying things that are unworthy of you. You are forgetting that it is my privilege to say no to the am in search of happiness. I too —"

He stood up, leaning far over the table, a penetrating look in his eyes.

"How long have you known, Bedelia?"

"Since the second day out on the *Jupiter*," she replied serenely.

He slowly resumed his seat, overwhelmed by the sickening realisation that his bubble had burst. She had known from the beginning. She had played with him. She had defied him!

"I know what you are thinking, Rex," she said, almost pleadingly. "You are thinking ill of me, and you are unjust. It was as fair for me as it was for you. We played a cautious game. You set about to win my love as you saw fit, my friend, and am I to be condemned if I exercised the same privilege? I was no more deliberate, no more reprehensible than you. Am I more guilty of deceit than you?"

He gave a great sigh of relief. "You are right," he said. "It is my turn to confess. I have known

for many days that you are not Bedelia Guile. We are quits."

She laughed softly. "I rather like Bedelia. I think I shall keep it as a good-luck name. We have now arrived at the time for a profound contemplation of the results of our experiments. In the meantime, I have had no dinner. I trust that the Prince of Graustark has dined so lightly that he will not decline to share my repast with me. It has already been ordered — for two."

"By jove, you — you amaze me!" he exclaimed.

"Please remove that dreadful mackintosh and touch the bell for me. You see, I am a very prosaic person, after all. Even in the face of disaster I can have a craving for food and drink. That's better."

In a sort of daze, he tapped the little table bell. A waiter appeared on the instant.

"Give us more light, waiter," was her command, "and serve dinner at once."

The lights went up, and Robin looked into her soft, smiling eyes.

"It doesn't matter," he whispered hoarsely. "I don't care what happens to me, Bedelia, I — I shall never give you up. You are worth all the kingdoms in the world. You are the loveliest, most adorable —"

"Hush! The eyes of your people are upon you. See! Even the waiter recognises his prince. He is overcome. Ah! He falters with the consommé. It is a perilous moment. There! I knew something

would happen, poor fellow. He has spilled — but, all is well; he has his wits again. See! He replenishes from the steaming tureen. We are saved."

Her mood was so gaily satiric, so inconsequential, that he allowed a wondering, uncertain smile to banish the trouble from his eyes as he leaned back in the chair and studied the vivid, excited face of the girl who had created havoc with his senses. She was dressed as he had seen her on board the *Jupiter* during those delightful days on deck: the same trim figure in a blue serge suit and a limp white hat, drawn well down over her soft brown hair, with the smart red tie and the never-to-be-forgotten scent of a perfume that would linger in his nostrils forever and forever.

"Do you think it strange that I should have asked you to meet me here in this unconventional way instead of at the Inn?" she inquired, suddenly serious. Again the shy, pleading expression stole into her eyes.

"I did think so, but no longer. I am glad that we are here."

"Mrs. Gaston is inside," she informed him quickly. "I do not come alone. An hour ago the Inn became quite impossible as a trysting place. A small party from the Regengetz arrived for dinner. Can you guess who is giving the dinner? The great and only William W. Blithers, sir, who comes to put an obstinate daughter upon the throne of Graustark, whether she will or no."

"Did he see you?" cried Robin.

"No," she answered, with a mischievous gleam in

her eyes. "I stole out through the back door, and sent Marie out with one of the porters to head you off. Then I came on here. I didn't even stop to change my gown."

"Hide and seek is a bully game," said he. "It can't last much longer, Bedelia. I think it is only right that we should go to your father and tell him that — everything is all right. It is his due. You've solved your own problem and are satisfied, so why not reveal yourself. There is nothing to be gained by further secrecy."

She was watching him closely. "Are you, after all is said and done, sure that you want to marry the daughter of William Blithers, in the face of all the bitter consequences that may follow such an act? Think hard, my dear. She is being forced upon you, in a way. Mr. Blithers' money is behind her. Your people are opposed to the bargain, for that is the way in which they will look upon it. They may act very harshly toward you. The name of Blithers is detested in your land. His daughter is reviled. Are you sure that you want to marry her, Re— Robin?"

"Are you through?" he asked, transfixing her with a determined look. "Well, then, I'll answer you. I do want to marry you, and, more than that, I mean to marry you. I love —"

"You may tell me, Robin, as we are driving back to the Inn together — not here, not now," she said softly, the lovelight in her eyes.

Happiness blurred his vision. He was thrilled by

an enchantment so stupefying that the power of speech, almost of thought, was denied him for the time being. He could only sit and stare at her with prophetic love in his eyes, love that bided its time and trembled with anticipation.

Long afterward, as they were preparing to leave Pingari's she said to him:

"My father is at the Inn, Robin. I ran away from him to-night because I wanted to be sure that our adventure was closed before I revealed myself to him. I wanted to be able to say to him that love will find its way, no matter how blind it is, nor how vast the world it has to traverse in search of its own. My father is at the Inn. Take me to him now, Robin, and make the miracle complete."

His fingers caressed her warm cheek as he adjusted the collar of the long seacoat about her throat and chin. Her eyes were starry bright, her red lips were parted.

"My Princess!" he whispered tenderly. "My Princess!"

"My Prince," she said so softly that the words barely reached his ears. "We have proved that Love is the king. He rules us all. He laughs at locksmiths — and fathers — but he does not laugh at sweethearts. Come, I am ready."

He handed her into the cab a moment later, and drew the long deep breath of one who goes down into deep water. Then he followed after her. The attendant closed the door.

"Where to, sir?" called Hobbs from the driver's seat.

He received no answer, yet cracked his whip gaily over the horses' backs and drove out into the slanting rain.

Hobbs was a dependable fellow. He drove the full length of the street twice, passing the Inn of the Stars both times at a lively clip, and might have gone on forever in his shuttlecock enterprise, had not the excited voice of a woman hailed him from the sidewalk.

"Stop! *Attendez!* You! Man!"

He pulled up with a jerk. The dripping figure of Marie ran up from behind.

"My mistress? Where is she?" panted the girl.

"In heaven," said Hobbs promptly, whereupon Marie pounded on the glass window of the cab.

Robin quickly opened the door.

"Wha — what is it?"

"Yes, Marie," came in muffled tones from the depths of the cab.

"Madame Gaston returns long ago. She is beside herself. She is like a maniac. She has lost you; she cannot explain to — to Mademoiselle's father. Mon dieu, when he met her unexpectedly in the hall, he shouts, 'where is my daughter?' And poor Madame she has but to shiver and stammer and — run away! *Oui!* She dash out into the rain! It is terrible. She —"

Bedelia broke in upon this jumbled recitation. "Where have we been, Robin? Where are we now?"

"Where are we, Hobbs?"

"We are just getting back to the Inn of the Stars, sir,— descending, you might say, sir," said Hobbs.

"Drive on, confound you."

"To the Inn, sir?"

"Certainly!"

The door slammed and the final block was covered in so short a time that Robin's final kiss was still warm on Bedelia's lips when the gallant cab rolled up to the portals of the Inn of the Stars.

"Did you ever know such a night, sir?" inquired Hobbs, as the Prince handed his lady out. He was referring to the weather.

CHAPTER XXIV

JUST WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED

Even the most flamboyant of natures may suffer depression at times, and by the same token arrogance may give way to humility,— or, at the very least, conviction.

Mr. Blithers had had a trying day of it. To begin with, his wife raked him over the coals for what she was pleased to call his senseless persistence in the face of what she regarded as unalterable opposition on the part of the Cabinet and House of Nobles. It appears that he had experienced a second encounter with the Ministry only the day before. After sleeping over the results of his first visit to the Council Chamber, he awoke to the fact that matters were in such a condition that it behooved him to strike while the iron was hot. So he obtained a second hearing, principally because he had not slept as well over it as he would have liked, and secondarily because he wanted to convince himself that he could parade their ancient halls without feeling as self-conscious as a whipped spaniel.

He came off even worse in his second assault upon the ministry, for this time the members openly sneered at his declarations. As for his progress through the enchanted halls he was no end worse off than before.

It so happened that he arrived at the castle at the very hour when the ladies and gentlemen of the royal household were preparing to fare forth to the tennis courts. He came upon them, first on the terrace, then in the entrance, and later on was stared at with evident curiosity by white flanneled and duck-skirted persons in the lofty halls. He wished that he was back at Blitherwood where simplicity was not so infernally common.

He made the mistake of his life when he gave to his wife the details of this second conference with the Cabinet. He did it in the hope that a sympathetic response would be forthcoming. To his surprise, she merely pitied him, but in such a disgustingly personal way that he wondered if he could ever forgive her.

"Can't you appreciate what I am doing for Maud?" he argued, almost tearfully.

"I can appreciate what you are doing *to* her," said she, and swept out of the room.

"It's bad enough to have one stubborn woman in the family," said he to himself, glaring at the closed door — which had been slammed, by the way,—"but two of 'em — Good Lord!"

And so it was that Mr. Blithers, feeling in need of cheer, arranged a little dinner for that evening, at the Inn of the Stars. He first invited his principal London lawyer and his wife — who happened to be *his* principal — and then sent a more or less peremptory invitation to the President of the Bank of Grau tark, urging him to join the party at the Regengeta

and motor to the Inn. He was to bring his wife and any friends that might be stopping with them at the time. The banker declined. His wife had been dead for twenty years; the only friends he possessed were directors in the bank, and they happened to be having a meeting that night. So Mr. Blithers invited his secondary London lawyer, his French lawyer and two attractive young women who it appears were related to the latter, although at quite a distance, and then concluded that it was best to speak to his own wife about the little affair. She said she couldn't even think of going. Maud might arrive that very night and she certainly was not going out of the hotel with such an event as that in prospect.

"But Simpson's wife is coming," protested Mr. Blithers, "and Pericault's cousins. Certainly you must come. Jolly little affair to liven us up a bit. Now Lou,—"

"I am quite positive that Lady Simpson will change her mind when she hears that Pericault's cousins are going," said Mrs. Blithers acidly.

"Anything the matter with Pericault's cousins?" he demanded, inclined to the bellicose.

"Ask Pericault," she replied briefly.

He thought for a moment. "If that's the case, Lou, you'll have to come, if only to save my reputation," he said. "I didn't think it of Pericault. He seems less like a Frenchman than any man I've ever known."

Mrs. Blithers relented. She went to the dinner and

so did Lady Simpson, despite Pericault's cousins, and the only ones in the party who appeared to be uneasy were the cousins themselves. It is safe to say that it was not the rain that put a dampener on what otherwise might have been an excessively jovial party.

Stupendous was the commotion at the Inn of the Stars when it became known that one of the richest men in the world — and a possible father-in-law apparent to the crown,— was to honour the place with his presence that night. Every one, from the manager down to the boy who pared potatoes, laid himself out to make the occasion a memorable one.

The millionaire's table was placed in the very centre of the dining-room, and plates were laid for eight. At the last minute, Mr. Blithers ordered the number increased to nine.

"My daughter may put in an appearance," he explained to Lady Simpson. "I have left word at the hotel for her to come up if by any chance she happens to arrive on the evening train."

"Haven't you heard from her, Mr. Blithers?" inquired the austere lady, regarding the top of his head with an illy-directed lorgnon.

They were entering the long, low dining-room. Mr. Blithers resented the scrutiny: It was lofty and yet stooping. She seemed to be looking down upon him at right angles, due no doubt to her superior height and to the fact that she had taken his arm.

"We have," said he, "but not definitely. She is likely to pop in on us at any moment, and then again

she's likely not to. My daughter is a very uncertain person, Lady Simpson. I never seem to be able to put my finger upon her."

"Have you ever tried putting the whole hand upon her?" inquired her ladyship, and Mr. Blithers stared straight ahead, incapable of replying.

He waited until they were seated at the table and then remarked: "I am sorry you got splashed, Lady Simpson. You'd think they might keep the approach to a place like this free of mud and water."

"Oh, I daresay the gown can be cleaned, Mr. Blithers," she said. "I am quite ready to discard it, in any event, so it really doesn't matter."

"My dear," said he to his wife, raising his voice so that diners at nearby tables could not help hearing what he said, "I forgot to tell you that we are expected to dine with the Prince at the Castle." Then he wondered if any one in the room understood English.

"When?" she inquired.

"Very shortly," said he, and she was puzzled for a moment by the stony glare he gave her.

Lord Simpson took this opportunity to mention that he had taken reservations for the return of himself and wife to Vienna on the next day but one.

"We shall catch the Orient Express on Friday and be in London by Monday," he said. "Our work here is completed. Everything is in ship-shape. Jenkins will remain, of course, to attend to the minor details, such as going over the securities and —"

"Don't you like that caviare?" asked Mr. Blithers with some asperity.

"It has a peculiar taste," said Lord Simpson.

"Best I've ever tasted," said Mr. Blithers, spreading a bun thickly. Pericault's cousins were fingering the champagne glasses. "We've got sherry coming first," said he.

"Everything satisfactory, M'sieur Blithers?" inquired the *maitre d'hotel* softly, ingratiatingly, into his left ear.

"Absolutely," said Mr. Blithers with precision. "You needn't hurry things. We've got the whole evening ahead of us."

Lady Simpson shivered slightly. The Pericault cousins brightened up. There was still a chance that the "dowagers" would retire early from the scene of festivity.

"By the way," said Simpson, "how long do you purpose remaining in Edelweiss, Blithers?"

For the first time, the capitalist faltered. He was almost ready to admit that his enterprise had failed in one vital respect. The morning's experience in the Council Chamber had shaken his confidence considerably.

"I don't know, Simpson," said he. "It is possible that we may leave soon."

"Before the Prince's dinner?" inquired Lady Simpson, again regarding his bald spot through the lorgnon.

"Depends on what my daughter has to say when

she gets here," said he almost gruffly. "If she wants to stay for a while, we will remain. I don't mind saying that I have a curious longing for Wall Street. I am at home there and — well, by George, I'm like a fish out of water here."

His wife looked up quickly, but did not speak.

"I am a business man, Lady Simpson, not a philanderer. I'd like to take this town by the neck and shake some real enterprise into it, but what can you do when everybody is willing to sit down and let tradition look after 'em? I've put a lot of money into Grosstock and I'd like to see the country prosper. Still I'm not worried over my investment. It is as good as gold."

"Perfectly safe," said Lord Simpson.

"Absolutely," said the secondary London lawyer.

Pericault's comment was in French and not intended to be brief, but as Mr. Blithers was no longer interested, the privilege of completing his remarks was not accorded him. He did say *Mon dieu* under his breath, however, in the middle of his employer's next sentence.

"As I said before, everything depends on whether my daughter wants to remain. If she says she wants to stay, that settles the point so far as I am concerned. If she says she doesn't want to stay, we'll — well, that will settle it also. I say, waiter, can't you hurry the fish along?"

"Certainly, sir. I understood M'sieur to say that there was no hurry —"

"Well, pour the champagne anyway. I think we need it."

Two hours later, Mr. Blithers looked at his watch again. The party was quite gay: at least fifty per-cent disorderly.

"That train has been in for an hour," said the host. "I guess Maud didn't come. I left word for the hotel to call me up if she arrived — I say, waiter, has there been a telephone message for me?"

"No, M'sieur. We have kept a boy near the telephone all evening, M'sieur. No message."

"I also told 'em to send up any telegram that might come," he informed his wife, who merely lifted her eyebrows. They had been lowered perceptibly in consequence of the ebullience of Pericault's cousins.

The vivacious young women were attracting a great deal of attention to their table. Smart diners in the immediate neighbourhood appeared to be a trifle shocked. Three dignified looking gentlemen, seated near the door, got up and left the room.

"We really must be going," said Mrs. Blithers nervously, who had been watching the three men for some time with something akin to dismay in her soul. She had the sickening notion that they were members of the Cabinet — lords of the realm.

"All right," said Mr. Blithers. "Call the cars up, waiter. Still raining?"

"Yes, M'sieur. At this season of the year —"

"Call the cars. Let's have your bill."

Pericault's cousins were reluctant to go. In fact,

they protested shrilly that it was silly to break up such a successful party at such an unseemly hour.

"Never mind," whispered Pericault softly, and winked.

"I'll leave 'em in your care, Pericault," said Mr. Blithers grimly. "They are *your* cousins, you know."

"Trust me implicitly, Monsieur," said Pericault, bowing very deeply. Then he said good-night to Mrs. Blithers and Lady Simpson. The secondary London lawyer did the same.

Out in the wide, brilliantly lighted foyer, a few late-stayers were waiting for their conveyances to be announced. As the four departing members of the Blithers party grouped themselves near the big doors, impatient to be off, a brass-buttoned boy came up and delivered a telegram to the host.

He was on the point of tearing open the envelope when his eyes fell upon two people who had just entered the hall from without, a man and woman clad in raincoats. At the same instant the former saw Mr. Blithers. Clutching his companion's arm he directed her attention to the millionaire.

"Now for it, Bedelia," he whispered excitedly.

Bedelia gazed calmly at Mr. Blithers and Mr. Blithers gazed blankly at the Prince of Graustark. Then the great financier bowed very deeply and called out:

"Good evening, Prince!"

He received no response to his polite greeting, for the Prince was staring at Bedelia as if stupefied. The

millionaire's face was very red with mortification as he turned it away.

"He — he doesn't recognise you," gasped Robin in amazement.

"Who?" she asked, her eyes searching the room with an eager, inquiring look.

"Your father," he said.

She gave him a ravishing, delighted smile.

"Oh, it is so wonderful, Robin. I have fooled you completely. That man isn't my father."

"That's Mr. Blithers or I am as blind as a bat," he exclaimed.

"Is it, indeed? The one reading the telegram, with his eyes sticking out of his head?"

Robin's head was swimming. "Good heaven, Bedelia, what are you —"

"Ah!" she cried, with a little shriek of joy. "See! There he is!"

One of the three distinguished men who had been remarked by Mrs. Blithers now separated himself from his companions and approached the couple. He was a tall, handsome man of fifty. Although his approach was swift and eager, there was in his face the signs of wrath that still struggled against joy.

She turned quickly, laid her hand upon the Prince's rigid arm, and said softly:

"My father is the Prince of Dawsbergen, dear."

. . . . . .

A crumpled telegram dropped from Mr. Blithers' palsied hand to the floor as he turned a white, despair-

ing face upon his wife. The brass-buttoned boy picked it up and handed it to Mrs. Blithers. It was from Maud.

"We were married in Vienna today. After all I think I shall not care to see Graustark. Channie is a dear. I have promised him that you will take him into the business as a partner. We are at the Bristol.

"MAUD."

THE END